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Imaginative Tales

MARCH 1958

ALL STORIES
NEW AND
COMPLETE

William L. Hamling
Editor

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The Editorial....

You don't have to be told that the *fiction* can now be deleted from science fiction. With the compliments of Moscow, interplanetary travel has arrived. Dateline —SPUTNIK.

It's true, of course, that no actual space ship has been launched. And it's also true that a multitude of technological problems will have to be resolved before the first space ship leaves Earth for the Moon. But make no mistake about it, space travel is here, not just around the corner.

How close it actually is we have from the Russians themselves. They've predicted that a "manned" ship will reach the moon in two years or less. Note the *less*. We don't doubt but that their prediction was carefully phrased from both a factual and propaganda standpoint. The propaganda value is self-evident. And the factual aspect would be foolhardy to ignore in light of what they have already achieved. Chances are they'll send a manned vessel to the moon in *less* than two years. Perhaps tomorrow! . . . Anyone scoffing?

All the scoffing is over with. You may recall how our government pointedly spoofed the news stories leaking from Russia a few years ago. Stories which said in flat language that the Russians were pile-

driving their space satellite program.

Our companion science fiction magazine IMAGINATION, ran a year's discussion on the subject in the letter section, not to mention constant pounding in editorials. Wire service news stories were quoted, and certainly the brass-hats in Washington read *those*. But everything was pooh-poohed from all sources. The guiding brains at our helm afforded themselves the colossal luxury of over-confidence in our own scientific superiority plus the unrealistic attitude (specifically at the head of the Defense department) that research programs merited considerably less than full official attention. The result was that no orders came from the top to give a priority rating to a space program. Afterall, the Russians were simply sounding off—they didn't have the brains to do this and we could take our own sweet time. Pretty foolish thinking when the "underdog" already had perfected an H-bomb—no mean accomplishment any way you blow the apple.

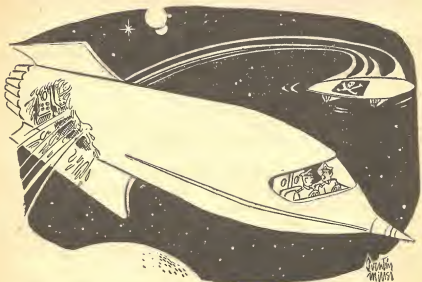
All that, of course, is water over the dam. Yet the criticism is justified, indeed, mandatory. Our government leaders, to whom the future of our country is entrusted, cannot sit smugly assured of anything except that we've got to be on

our best and at our best in all technological fields simultaneously. The irony is that even now, when the looked-upon "hot air" from Russia turned out to be live steam, some of the top men in Washington (ensconced in the White House and on down) continue to belittle the Russian achievement with such down-grading comments as "the silly bauble" etc.

How much do some people have to be shown? If there still exists any doubt in official minds as to the importance of what has happened then we better ship some psychiatrists to Washington post haste. For what *has* happened is the greatest thing in the history of mankind. Beside it the discovery of

the New World by Columbus pales into obscurity. Mankind is at the threshold of space. His dark little closet abode is opening. For the first time he will step *outside*, not to witness the wonders of a mere world—but an entire solar system, and, ultimately, a universe. It's staggering. It's unbelievable. It's science fiction. And yet it is fact.

This is no time for belittling a foreign technology. It is no time for assuming the other guy's bluffing—about anything. It's time to get off our duffs and produce. We may not be the first ones to reach the Moon. The important thing is to reach it. The future of man is not written on the maps of Earth. It's charted among the stars. . .with



"Personally, I think they're bluffing!"



Men Of The Morning Star

by

Edmond Hamilton

Who were these strange beings? And what was the secret of their shadow world in alien ocean depths? Did they mean death to Kerrick?

THE KNIFE CAME out of the fog behind Kerrick, so that he didn't see it until it went past his ear and clattered against the dripping stone of the

sea-wall ahead. The metal glittered nastily in the dim light of an oil-wood torch at the corner.

Operating on sheer physical instinct, Kerrick bent over and made



a clumsy leap sideways. He was a little drunk, and he had been until this minute in a mild peaceful state where the inner fog nicely balanced the outer one and he could forget how long it seemed since he had seen the sun and the stars and smelled a clean cold wind. Now fear came with a wild shock.

Someone was trying to kill him. And he had not the faintest idea why.

He floundered in close to a warehouse wall, where the dim light was dimmer and the fog was clotted thick. He tried to see who was behind him on the quay, but all he could see was the mist rolling in slow waves from the tideless sea. The three torches that marked the tavern he had just left made a golden blob against the mist, which was tinged with the color of the purple night of Venus where cloud and sea, land and air are never quite dark, any more than they are ever quite light by day.

He listened, and he heard the faint, small, furtive sounds of bare-footed men moving lightly over the moss-grown paving stones, toward him.

The stone wall of the warehouse was solid to where the torch burned, marking the end of the quay and lighting the huge, vaguely anthropomorphic god who sat at

the corner of the breakwater and peered eternally out to sea. Kerrick was unarmed and sober enough to know that he was just a little too foggy to fight effectively. He began to run for the corner. Beyond it the road led between the city and the sea to the Company plant, a distance of less than a mile. He might not be able to make the plant, but he would have a chance to dodge and hide until his head cleared and he could at least fight back.

The padding footsteps behind him came faster, and now he heard voices whispering.

The dim glare of the torch lit up his tight red tunic like a flame. The light seemed as bright as a midday sun as he passed under it. The flesh of his back quivered, anticipating a thrown blade.

It did not come. Kerrick darted around the corner, dizzy with relief.

Two men stood dim and sinister in the fog, squarely in his road.

And now he understood that this was no chance encounter. These men had circled around to cut him off in case he escaped that first knife. The whole pack of them must have been in position and waiting for him when he left the tavern. The two in front of him were Venusians, tall white-skinned men with pale eyes and

albinoid hair, wearing the short loose garment common to the lower classes. They held drawn knives.

They sprang at him.

Kerrick whirled and ran across the quay. The thrown knife still lay where it had fallen. He picked it up and turned, backing into the angle of the sea-wall where the god sat. He set his shoulders against the broad stone buttocks, worn smooth as glass by a thousand generations of passing fishermen stroking them for luck. He held the knife out like a sword in front of him and snarled at the shapes coming toward him in the blue fog.

"What do you want with me?" he demanded, in his painful copy-book Venusian.

And one of the men said slowly, so that he would understand, "We will kill you and throw your body before the palace gates."

There was a cold implacable hatred in the man's voice that affected Kerrick more than the threat, though that was unpleasant enough.

"But why?" he said in astonishment. "I've done no wrong. I'm a diver-technician—"

"You're a *litharni*", the man said. "Some day all the *litharni* will be dead, and the Sulvini with them."

Litharni meant roughly *wearers of the red*, and the Sulvini were

the local ruling class. Kerrick realized that he was in the middle of something bigger than a mere matter of murder for robbery, or even murder for fun.

The red tunic was the Company uniform. The Company was Jones & Lansing Sea-Mines, Inc. A couple of centuries ago on Earth, having used up all available land resources, men had begun to mine the sea water of its dilute but incalculable wealth, taking from it not only gold and silver but vital supplies of uranium, copper, manganese, and a dozen more minerals essential to keep Earth's vast industries going and her food supply adequate. Then when interplanetary flight had been established, and the seas of Venus were found to be infinitely richer in minerals than the seas of Earth, it was inevitable that outfits like Jones & Lansing would set up their great pumps and vats and atomic fractionators on the misty beaches and start sucking the riches from these endless oceans.

They operated under direct agreement with the Sulvini, the rulers. Kerrick in his innocence had supposed that everybody was happy about the arrangement. The Company tunic, indeed, was designed to set Company employees apart from such Terran riff-raff as could be found in any port, and in

the few weeks Kerrick had been here he had found that it was a guarantee of red-carpet treatment almost anywhere in the city.

It seemed that there were some who did not feel that way about it at all.

THEY CLOSED IN ON HIM out of the fog, padding on their hard bare feet over the wet stones. The air was warm, rank with the smell of weed and water, stifling on the lungs. Kerrick sweated and his heart hammered. There were five men. They all had knives but one.

His back and sides were protected in the angle of the wall but that was not going to do him much good. Their superior numbers would simply pin him eventually against the stones and they could take turns cutting him up at their leisure. His position was more of a trap than an advantage. If he could get through them, clear of them, he might be able to run—

He took a deep breath and charged straight for the one unarmed man.

As Kerrick had hoped, the man flinched aside from the long blade and bumped into the man beside him, fouling his weapon-arm and creating a momentary gap in the line. Kerrick plunged into it, swing-

ing his knife in great slashing arcs. The Venusians avoided him easily. They let him get almost though between them and then one of them hooked a foot around his ankle from behind and brought him crashing down on the oozy stones. The knife flew out of his hand. This is it, he thought, with the breath going out of him in a rush and the blue mist turning darker around his ringing head. This is it, and oh God what a hell of a place to die and not even know why you're doing it.

He wrenched himself over in a sudden fury, onto his back with his knees pulled up and his arms bent to protect his face. They were already on top of him. He kicked upward with both feet and caught one of them in the belly. The man gasped and dropped away backward, but there were still four others. Kerrick saw a hand with a knife in it swinging in hard toward his throat. He caught the wrist and pulled it up and over and the man was yanked forward off balance. He fell on top of Kerrick, and Kerrick grappled with him, thinking, I can kill at least one to keep me company—

Hard bare feet kicked him in the side of the head, in the ribs and groin. His grip weakened. He felt the man pulled away from him and nowhere was nothing

between him and their blades, no possible further stalling of the inevitable.

And then he heard the voice speaking.

It spoke Venusian, liquid and pure, without accent, but somehow Kerrick knew it was an Earthman's voice. It spoke with a quiet authority. Kerrick tried to see through the fog and daze of pain. He thought the Venusians had drawn back a little away from him. They were arguing heatedly, but the voice of the Earthman kept saying, something that sounded like, "This is not the way." And they were hesitating to kill Kerrick,

Kerrick struggled up to his hands and knees and he saw the Earthman in the light of the oil-wood torch, clouded in the blue fog so that he was more a stark face and a pair of shoulders and two strong hands than a whole man. The face was bleached white as a native's by sunless years, cured to a leathery leanness by wind and water, a half geometric structure of strong horizontal bones with the vertical planes of the cheeks sunk a little inward and the eyes deeply shadowed. He wore no hat. His hair was thick and roughly cut. It had been black but was now quite gray.

Kerrick rubbed the back of his wrist across his mouth to get the

blood and the moss out of it. "For God's sake," he said to the Earthman, "tell them I haven't done them any harm—"

The Earthman said curtly, "Shut up." He continued to speak to the Venusians, who continued to argue, though obviously with respect. Most of the talk was too rapid for Kerrick to follow, even if his head had been clear. The Earthman pointed out past the sitting god, to where the dark water breathed and glimmered in the purple gloom. The Venusians looked that way too. Then they looked uneasily at each other, and finally at Kerrick, and one of them smiled, a very unpleasant smile as though he would be happy to forego Kerrick's murder so that something much nastier could happen to him. Then they sheathed their knives and went away, one of them assisting the one Kerrick had kicked and who was still unable to stand straight.

Kerrick was able to stand. He watched them go with a mixed feeling of rage and shivering relief.

"Thanks," he said to the Earthman. "Another second and—what the devil was the matter with them? Why kill me?"

The Earthman looked at him. His eyes were dark, very keen, very kind, and yet with a certain

paradoxical hint of ruthlessness about them. His attitude toward Kerrick seemed to be one of speculation, as though he had pulled something up in a net and wasn't sure yet what it was.

"Could you use a drink?" he said.

"Damn right I could," said Kerrick. Reaction was melting him down inside like so much wax. He started toward the golden halo of light in front of the tavern on the quay. The Earthman caught his arm.

"Haven't you had enough for one night? How long have you been on Venus?"

"Twelve weeks, mostly on Island 6. This is my first real leave."

THE EARTHMAN GRUNTED.

"And doesn't the Company teach you to stay in the city when you want relaxation?"

"I think they mentioned it. But I wanted to see—"

"Native life in the raw. Of course."

"Well, you don't have to make it sound so snooty," Kerrick said, getting mad all over again. "I wasn't sneering at them. If I'm going to be stuck here for three solid years I want to—"

"Let's go get that drink," said the Earthman, cutting him off. "This way."

He led off along the inland road

toward the city. Kerrick followed, still too upset to be more than feebly resentful of the man's rudeness. Besides, the man had saved his life, and he did want a drink, and above all an explanation.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Twenty-three years."

A drifter, thought Kerrick. A renegade. And yet he didn't look like one.

"My name's Kerrick. George Kerrick. I'm a diver-technician—"

"With the Company. Yes. My name is Thane. If I ever had another one I've forgotten it. I'm a diver-technician too, in a way. Marine biologist. To your right there—yes, right through that crack. This is a short cut."

Kerrick slid into an alley no more than three feet wide between two high stone tenements. Nearly everything on Venus was built of stone because any other material washed, rotted or rusted away in the sweating dampness and torrential rains. The alley was extremely dark and smelly. Kerrick could make out a dim glow at the far end. He hurried toward it and was glad when he came out into a long narrow courtyard, overhung on four sides with tiers of balconies and lighted both by torches at the low tunnel entrance opposite the narrow alley and by lamps in-

side the windows. There was a beehive murmur of voices and laughter from the apartments and the flat populous roofs. The omnipresent fog curled gently over all.

Thane guided him up ladderlike steps with the rungs worn into hollows in the center.

"You wanted to see native life," he said. "I'll show you some. This is my home when I come in from the reefs. I've known these people for a generation now. I consider them my family—my *other* family." He paused. "I have two of them, you know."

Probably a native wife and some half-bred kids out on the reefs, Kerrick thought, and decided it was none of his business. But he wondered how even a marine biologist—if Thane really was one—could live for twenty-three years in the godforsaken and still only superficially known maze of reefs and weed and half-submerged islands that made the shallow Venusian oceans impossible of navigation for anything but the small native craft.

Thane motioned him onto a balcony about midway up. A brace of floss-haired children were curled like puppies on a heap of soft rugs at the back of it, sound asleep. There was a curious kind of trident with round knobs instead of prongs hung up on hooks above

the door.

"Go in," said Thane, and Kerrick stooped his head under the low arch.

The room inside was spacious and clean. There was a raised and hooded fireplace in one corner, some low chests, tanned skins to soften the red stone walls and bright woven rugs on the stone floor. Along one wall ran a raised platform that was sitting space for all by day and sleeping space by night. There were four people and a baby on it now.

Kerrick still had trouble trying to judge the ages of Venusians, who did not seem to develop as many wrinkles as Earth-folk. But it didn't take much ingenuity to figure that one of the couples were the grandparents of the baby and the other its mother and father. The older couple looked as though they had a lot of good years in them yet. The two men were playing some gambling game and drinking the pale-brown mild intoxicant that looked like flat beer and tasted like nothing under the sun. The women were doing something with the baby. They all turned toward the door, their expressions changing swiftly from welcome for Thane to the exact opposite at the sight of Kerrick and his red tunic.

The men got up sharply, letting the pieces fall.

CHAPTER II

THANE SAID, speaking slowly now so that Kerrick could follow, "I have promised this man a drink for his body and words for his soul. He was set upon near the Watching God and almost killed. He desires to know why."

"Anyone in the harbor quarter could have told him," said the older man. "Why bring him here?"

"I'm not sure," said Thane, smiling. "It was a thought that came to me. This is a diver, a man of the sea himself, and he has only been a *litharni* for twelve weeks. Perhaps there is hope for him."

Both men grunted as though they doubted it.

Kerrick said grimly, "Ordinarily I'm damned if I'll stay where I'm not wanted, but this time I'm staying. Five men just tried to cut my throat. I want to know what their grievance was and whether it's likely to happen again, and what the devil goes on. So you can't insult me."

"Well, then," said the older man grudgingly, "sit down. You're Thane's guest and so I refrain from throwing you out bodily." He turned to speak to the older woman, who rose with a perfectly, stony countenance and fetched clay cups and a jug.

Thane made the introductions.

"This is Donavel, whose trident hangs there—" He pointed to a second round-tipped trident hung above the door inside, and Kerrick understood that this was a symbol of headship, "—and Verilan, his son. They are herdsmen."

"Herdsmen," said Kerrick. "You mean the fellows in the kayaks?"

Now he remembered where he had seen tridents like that before. When he was out on Island 6 several men had gone past in tiny boats that could be rolled over without taking water. They had been furiously active, going with a rush and a cry after a school of great fishy creatures with crimson scales, and they had used tridents to prod the brutes on and keep them together. It had been explained to Kerrick that they were herdsmen bringing their charges back from seasonal pasturage in the weed-beds. It had seemed like a slimy job to Kerrick, but he had become used to eating the fish, which was pretty good. And it stood to reason that on a planet where the largest single land area was only slightly larger than New Zealand the people would have to look to the oceans for their food supply.

Thane said, "The fellows in the kayaks, yes. Drink, Kerrick, and Donavel will tell you why the *litharni* are not loved."

Donavel leaned forward. Like his son he was lean and muscular, with a shrewd eye and capable hands.

"You are spoilers," he said to Kerrick. "Like the Sulvini, and like the great solar tide that takes and never gives again. At first we thought you Earthmen were good, the beginning of a new day for us, who are not so ignorant as the Sulvini hope to keep us. A few of us have travelled, a few of us have videos and talking books. Knowledge is hard to keep out. So we believed. Now the Sulvini will have to change their ways a little and there will be schools and medical places and more contact with the outside. But has this been so? Hah! The Sulvini grow fat on royalties from the mining lease, and the Company grows fat on minerals taken from our seas. While we—"

"We," said Verilan quietly, "will starve one day." And he looked at his wife and baby.

Kerrick shook his head. "But why?"

"The Company spreads and spreads. You say you are a diver, you know the sea. Then you must know how your planets are changing the currents, killing the sea growths, altering the temperature of the water, spreading pollution from your wastes. The fishing

fleets must go farther and farther to find a catch. Our coastal pasturage is vanishing and our beasts die because the chemical balance is upset. The men who farm the weed-crops are driven beyond their agreed boundaries, and still our rulers the Sulvini lease more islands to the Company and squander their millions on luxuries while we get nothing. Now. Do you understand why we hate the *litharni*?"

Feeling uncomfortable, guilty and resentful all at once, Kerrick was about to say something when the older woman spoke for the first time in a voice sharp with long-pent anger.

"Greed will betray you all," she said. "You already trespass on the Grelvi seas. The Sulvini have forgotten how those boundaries were set in ancient times, and the Company does not know. But the Grelvi will teach you both!"

"I hope not," said Thane, and his face was suddenly very grave.

"Listen," said Kerrick, "I'm sorry if things are bad for you. I didn't know the sea-mining operations were making it tough. But we—the *litharni*—are in about the same spot. We have to work for a living, and we have to go where the bosses tell us. We don't have anything to do with running the Company or making its policies. We never saw either Jones or Lan-

sing, and we don't even see Welker—he's the Company manager—unless he calls us on the carpet for something. So if you killed every one of us it wouldn't change anything. And who are the Grelvi, anyway?"

"Tell him, Thane," said a new voice from the doorway. Kerrick started and turned around, and so did everybody else. The voice was a woman's, with ringing quality in it, but all Kerrick could see was a tallish form covered from head to foot in a coarse cloak of broad yellow weed-leaves, cured and tied by the stems like thatch to keep the rain off.

"Lella!" cried Thane, and jumped up to go to her. The Venusians rose smiling, but were more shyly respectful than Thane, who took hold of a white hand that appeared through the thatch, and shook it warmly.

THE PERSON INSIDE the cloak said, "I heard you had come back, Thane. I got away the first minute I could. But I didn't expect to find a *litharni* here."

Thane glanced at Kerrick, who was standing quietly watching. "It's an experiment," said Thane. "I'm not sure how it will turn out."

"It's all right," said Lella. "I want to talk to him."

She rustled the thatched cloak

and Thane lifted it away from her. Kerrick's eyes opened wide.

This was a woman of the Sulvini, a very young one, hardly more than a girl, but with a vitality and loveliness that were startling to come upon so abruptly and without warning. Her skin had the white translucence of pearl, and her body was just about perfect under a clinging chiton of some mist-colored stuff. The women of the herders wore their long pale hair in a loose knot, and they were handsome enough with their clear features and their sea-green eyes. Lella's eyes were the color of amethysts and her hair was dyed—after the custom of the Sulvini women—to match them, cut short and curled in feathery curls around her head.

Kerrick tried to remember the proper Venusian form for greeting a high-born lady, and all he could do was stammer.

Lella laughed. "You seem almost human. How long have you been a *litharni*?"

"Only twelve weeks," said Kerrick, and for some reason the words came out with a sound of apology for having been one even that long.

Thane placed Lella's cloak over a chest and went out onto the balcony. Kerrick heard him speak to someone—probably, Kerrick thought, Lella's servant. She would

hardly have come alone into the harbor quarter at night.

Lella sat down on the platform, where Donavel and the others practically enthroned her. She talked to them as to old friends and admired the baby. Kerrick shifted from one foot to the other, trying not to stare. He had seen Sulvini women around in the city, of course, but never so close, and few of them had looked anything like this.

Thane came back in, looking worried. "Harn says he thinks someone followed you."

"Harn is worse than an old woman for seeing danger in every shadow," Lella said, waving a hand in affectionate scorn.

"Just the same," said Thane, and spoke to Verilan, who thrust a long knife in his belt and went outside.

"There are some people who disapprove of my revolutionary activities," Lella explained to Kerrick. "They would dearly love to catch me at them, so that I might be legally locked up and married off." She made a grimace of profound distaste and was about to say more when Thane stopped her, shaking his head.

Lella smiled. "But this young man has honest eyes, Thane. I would trust—oh, well, of course you're right." Her face became

serious. "Let us hear about the Grelvi. I know that only a crisis would bring you in from the reefs at this time of the year."

Thane turned to Kerrick. "You said you had been on Island 6 most of your twelve weeks?"

"That's right. It's an old installation, of course, and diving there is routine. They were just breaking me in. I believe they always do that with new divers—team them up with a veteran on an old plant so as to teach them what to look out for."

"Was there any talk about Island 10?"

"Some. It's the newest one and the farthest out. I don't think they've even started construction there yet."

"And you never heard of the Grelvi?"

"No."

"You will. Island 10 is on their border."

Kerrick frowned, trying to remember his Venusian geography. "I don't remember the map showing anything but a mess of reefs and weed in that area, and little hunks of rock like Island 10. Is there a big island there I missed?"

"No. There's no big island. There's no land worthy of the name for a thousand miles. The Grelvi have a different kind of country." His face had become in-

tent and grave, somehow conveying a very solid threat.

"They're a quiet folk. They haven't needed to go to war for centuries, not since the boundaries were set. They don't mix with the land-dwellers, and everybody has more or less forgotten about them—"

"Not everybody," said Lella, interrupting. "Donavel hasn't forgotten. Neither have the fishermen and the weed farmers. Only the Sulvini have forgotten."

"You mean the Sulvini are leasing sites to the Company that they don't really have title to?" asked Kerrick.

"In the case of Island 10," said Thane, "yes."

Kerrick said slowly, "That could make an awful lot of trouble for everybody."

He was a little staggered at the thought of just how much trouble it could make.

"And Island 10 is only the first step," said Lella. There was a bitter note in her voice. She turned those brilliant amethyst eyes on Kerrick and went on, forcefully, "I will tell you, *litharni*, that all of my class are not bad, that all of us are not fools, that some of us do not like what is being done to our own people. Unfortunately there are not enough of us to overthrow the party in power—"

"Without help," muttered Donavel, and Lella glanced at him in quick alarm.

"Hush," she said. "I was about to say 'by vote', especially so long as the sea-mineral royalties buy palaces and ropes of jewels for so many. And so things must get worse before they get better. Perhaps, Thane, your beloved Grelvi will be the answer, if not for Island 10, then for Island 11 and Island 12—oh, yes. Welker has been talking terms already with the Lawmaker."

"Lawmaker" was the title of the local petty king.

"But," said Kerrick, "if that's true, all you have to do is tell Welker—you'd have to have proof, of course, which I imagine you have or could get—"

"I gave Welker proof a year ago," said Thane quietly. "He told me to get back to my reefs and my unsavory relationships and spare him my crackpot interference."

THINKING IT just possible that Welker might have known what he was talking about, Kerrick said,

"Couldn't you send a message to the big bosses on Earth? They'd at least investigate."

"Would they? With all that money involved? I wonder. And

anyway, the Lawgiver personally reads and censors all messages sent out from the city. I don't think Welker would let me use the Company radio, either."

In an abrupt rush of words that surprised Kerrick by their violence, Thane continued.

"Perhaps that's why I brought you here, to pass on this information to someone in the Company so that if anything happens to me there may still be a chance of getting the facts to someone who will listen."

"Are you expecting something to happen?"

"It would not cause me the slightest surprise. So remember this night."

"I'm not likely to forget it," Kerrick said, and looked at Lella.

There was a sudden scream of childish fright, an outcry and a scurry of feet from the balcony.

Instantly Thane and Donavel sprang to the door, two steps behind the children's mother. Kerrick hesitated for a second. Lella had stiffened where she sat and he was shocked to see an expression of genuine terror in her eyes.

He followed Thane and Donavel onto the balcony.

He almost collided with a large muscular stranger who was on his way in. Thane said,

"This is Harn—he'll stay with

Lella."

The woman was hustling the two sobbing little ones inside, her face white. Verilan was already halfway to the roof. The others followed him, scrambling up the worn stone steps past balconies filled with curious craning heads. There was a babble of voices. Thane said over his shoulder,

"A man crept down from the roof behind Harn and got into the balcony through the outer arch." Apparently he meant that the man had swung himself over the ledge of the balcony above, a nerve-shattering feat with that drop to the stones below. "Verilan was watching the courtyard from farther down. If the man hadn't wakened the children we might never have known he was there."

Then somebody had followed Lella. Kerrick was angry. He didn't know why. It was none of his business—

But she had looked so frightened.

They emerged onto the roof. It was as wide and flat as a ball-park, comprising several tenements built side by side. There were channels to carry off the rain and lumpish-looking gods perched at the corners and at intervals along the parapets, wherever landlords or tenants had had the pious whim to put them. There were also a

number of people there, watching with cheerful excitement and quarrelling loudly about exactly what they had seen and where the stranger had disappeared to. Donavel and his son went rapidly among them, peering at them in the dim light and asking names.

A sheet of lightning flared across the southern sky and a wind sprang up, rolling the mist in sullen masses across the roofs.

Donavel came back. "These are all tenants. They disagree, every one swearing to a different thing. The man was a Venusian and he wore a dark-colored tunic and he crossed the roof. More than that I can't say. All we can do is search."

Thane nodded. "I'll go this way." He glanced at Kerrick. "You'd better go back down."

"No," said Kerrick, "I think I'll stay."

"As you will. Suppose you try the north side. It'll storm soon. If we don't catch our man before then he'll be gone for good."

They scattered out in different directions. Kerrick ran across the weatherbeaten stones, feeling uneasily that this night was going to prove the unluckiest one of his life so far. He almost wished Thane had left him alone on the quay. Then he thought that if all this stuff about the greedy Sulvini

granting leases to other peoples' islands was true, everybody in the Company was in trouble and he was better off to know it.

And Welker—Jonathan C. Welker, the efficient Great Stone Face in the Front Office—was he in on it, too? Thane had said so. He had even implied that Welker might not be above having him killed to shut his mouth about the outer islands.

And of course Thane might be no more a crackpot, and Lella an earnest kid mixed up in an illusory cause. But—

Kerrick had a strong idea that it might be best for him to talk to this spy—who had looked in upon a scene of which he was a part and would inevitably report same—and find out who the man was working for and why.

It occurred to him in passing that he still had no clear idea of who or what the Grelvi were.

The wind was strengthening, blowing in huge gusts. The fog was torn, rolled, and swept away, and suddenly the sea, the harbor, and the city stood clear. Out on the dark water the lightning danced and flared. The crowded huddle of tenements of which this one was a part rimmed all the curving beaches and ran back over the low-lying ground—seasonally flooded by the solar tides—until

suddenly the ground rose and the villas of the Sulvini showed on the terraced hillsides, set wide apart among flowering trees. Over all, on the very height of the hill, the ancient fortress of the Lawmakers hulked like a monument to a ruder age, its gaunt towers built all of black stone. To his right, on a jutting promontory a mile or more down the coast, Kerrick could see the flat white plasticoid buildings and towered monstrosities of the Company plant, glimmering in the lightning-glare.

The first rain came and in a matter of seconds the tenants had vanished off the roof.

Kerrick could hear them laughing and chattering down the steps. He doubted that the stranger was among them. He would be sure to be noticed. Either he had already got away or he was still hiding somewhere on the roofs.

Wind and rain drove across the city and now everything was obscured again. The lightning was tremendous, the thunder gargantuan. Kerrick went down almost to his hands and knees to avoid being blown away. The downpour made it difficult to breathe, almost impossible to see.

There was a row of stone godlings perched along the parapet, a little distance away. The lightning showed them at intervals, briefly

stark in the purplish glare.

A particularly vivid flash caught one of the smaller godlings in the act of rising and running away.

CHAPTER III

KERRICK WAS on the man before he had gone three paces. They fell together on the stones, rolling and thrashing in the inch or so of water that had already accumulated. Another flash showed him the Venusian's face, white and startled. It was a nasty face, not at all the kind that Kerrick wanted overseeing anything he personally was connected with. He leaned back and gave it a good solid smash with his first.

It wasn't enough. Not nearly enough. The man was as strong as a tiger and this was obviously not the first time in his life he had had to fight. He went for the inevitable long knife in his girdle. Kerrick pounded him in the face again and managed to snatch the knife out and throw it away. Then he was caught in an explosion of fists and knees, feet and elbows.

The man was savagely anxious to shake him off and get away. Kerrick hung on. In a way he enjoyed it. The knife was not his weapon, but he had always been handy with his fists at need and he had a powerful load of resent-

ments to work off.

They rolled and pounded and flailed together in the midst of the storm, while the gutters began to roar like little Niagaras. The man's flesh was slippery with the wet, hard to hold onto. Twice he almost broke away and twice Kerrick stopped him, the second time with a fine kick under the ribs that knocked the wind out of him just long enough for Kerrick to scramble on top of him and get a strong grip on his rubbery neck.

"Who sent you?" he shouted, trying to bellow over the noise of the storm. He banged the Venusian's head up and down against the stones and the running water splashed. "What are you trying to find out?"

The man rolled under his knees, trying to get away. In the lightning flares his eyes and his bared teeth glittered like an animal's. He panted heavily but he did not speak.

Kerrick pressed down harder on his throat. "Answer me!"

The man appeared to be strangling, between Kerrick's grip and the water that was pouring into his mouth and nose. He made frantic gestures. Kerrick let up on him. There was no sign of Thane and the others. Either they were still searching their areas of roof or else they had dived for shelter like wise men, giving up the search

as hopeless in this storm.

The Venusian gasped, "This is—a private matter, *litharni*. Not your affair."

"I'm making it mine. Who sent you?"

"The Lawmaker."

Kerrick laughed. "Try again."

The man seemed genuinely angry. "You're a fool, *litharni*. You ask for ill fortune. The Lawmaker is Lella's father."

That rocked Kerrick back on his heels. "The Lawmaker?" he repeated. "Lella's father?" Things jarred abruptly into a new and even less happy perspective.

And now the Venusian laughed, silently, while his hands rubbed at his bruised throat.

"Lella's father," he said. "And he doesn't like her choice of friends. Poor *litharni*!"

His hand darted suddenly into the breast of his tunic and came out with a lumpy stringy thing that Kerrick barely saw before it was whipped across his head with such force that he thought lightning must have struck him. In the next second he felt himself thrown off. He made a blind effort to get up and go after the man but when his sight cleared the Venusian was already out of reach and running like the wind.

The next flash of lightning showed the roof empty.

KERRICK TURNED slowly and walked away, holding his head, wondering what the devil had hit him.

Thane and the others had come looking for him, having drawn blanks themselves. He explained what had happened in about three words, while they stood with their heads together and the water washed over their ankles and the storm got incredibly worse. Then they fought their way down the steps to the refuge of the apartment.

Lella was still there. Kerrick faced her. "Is the Lawmaker your father?"

"Yes," she said, "He is."

"That makes things just fine," said Kerrick sourly, and looked at Thane. "Thanks so much for bringing me here. You'd have done better just to let them cut my throat."

"Never mind that," said Thane grimly. "Tell me exactly what happened."

Kerrick told him, right down to the ignominious finish. "I didn't see what the damned thing was," he concluded, "he hauled it out so fast, and he gave me a royal bang on the head with it and then ran. And that's all."

Thane grunted, frowning. He reached into his own tunic—which was the loose Venusian type—and brought out a woven metallic cord about two feet long, very strong

and pliable, and furnished with two lumps of lead or something equally heavy at each end.

Kerrick said instantly, "Yes, that was it."

"And he said the Lawmaker sent him to spy on Lella?"

"Yes."

"He was lying," Thane said, and swung the weighted cord between his hands.

"How do you know?" demanded Kerrick.

It was Lella who explained.

"That is a strangler's weapon. Thane has his own reasons for carrying one, but among our people only criminals have use for them. Now, it is true that my father and I are at sword's points. But not he nor any of the Sulvini would hire a criminal to spy on their women."

"That is so," said Donavel, and all the others nodded.

"All right," said Kerrick. "Then who did send him?"

Thane glanced uneasily at Lella. "We don't know."

"But we can make a shrewd guess, can't we, Thane?" she said, and her face was practically incandescent with anger. "We must tell the *litharni*—Kerrick? Yes, Kerrick. It would not be fair not to warn him."

She spoke directly to Kerrick.

"Your Mr. Welker has been bar-

gaining for me with my father."

For some reason difficult to explain, this outraged Kerrick. Perhaps it was because he did not like Welker very well. Their contacts had necessarily been few and far from intimate, but the man struck him as a thoroughly cold fish and he was not popular among the employees. Or perhaps it was because it seemed unthinkable that anyone like Lella should be bargained for like an animal or a piece of property.

He said, "You think the spy was working for Welker?"

"You've only been among us for twelve weeks," Lella said. "Our customs are perhaps strange to you. I am a Sulvini, and so I may not be forced to marry against my will—*unless* I am caught in some crime against the state or against the person of another Sulvini. Then I lose all independent rights and may be dealt with at the discretion of the Lawmaker."

"I see," said Kerrick. "And Welker figures that if he can prove you're in some kind of conspiracy he can get you that way."

Kerrick discovered that he hated Mr. Welker very deeply.

Thane had been talking earnestly with Donavel and the others. Now he said to Kerrick,

"You had better go now. If you're questioned about tonight,

say that I brought you here after that business on the quay simply to see that you were all right—which is the truth—and then play dumb about the rest. You didn't understand most of the talk, and you thought the girl was the daughter of the house, and the man you caught a robber. Do this for us as well as yourself. You do owe me a debt."

Kerrick grunted. "And what about Island 10?"

"I'll leave that to your conscience. If the time comes when you think you must do something about it, you have the information. If you need proof, go to the Grelvi. In the meantime, watch out for yourself. Times are approaching a crisis here and the *litharni* will feel it. Stay away from the quays and dark places."

THANE GAVE a brief wry smile and held out the weighed cord.

"You'd better have this. It may serve you with the Grelvi too—they know it's mine. See here." He showed Kerrick how the weights were stamped with a curious little symbol. "That's their writing. Most of my belongings are marked with it, so that even strange Grelvi let me alone."

Kerrick hesitated, and Thane said, "Take it. I'm going to tackle

the Lawmaker himself in the morning and I can't use it on him."

"Well," said Kerrick. "All right."

He took the thing and stowed it under his belt.

Lella was talking to the women. Their faces were all grim and strained and the young mother kept looking anxiously at her brood. Harn, the big man who was Lella's servant and guardian, brought the stiff cloak and started to bundle her into it.

Kerrick went to her and said two rather foolish things. "I'm sorry," he said, and, "Be careful."

She seemed to understand what he meant, because she smiled and held out her hand to him and said, "You, too. If you ever need help come to me, and I will do what I can." Then she said darkly, "Unless—"

Kerrick pressed her hand. It felt warm in his with a beautiful warmth that went all through him and made him dizzy. And he said something even more foolish.

He said, "Unless you are the one who needs help. In that case, come to me."

She looked at him deeply and steadily for a moment, ceasing to smile. Then Harn took her away and a few minutes later Kerrick himself was sloshing forlornly

through the rain in the empty courtyard below, wondering in just what way he would be able to help Lella against the combined power of her father and the Company under the guidance of J. C. Welker.

As he started under the low arch he turned and glanced back at the apartment he had just left.

It was already pitch dark.

He shivered and hurried through the storm-scoured streets and out along the road to the Company plant.

He was awakened next morning, in his small functional living cubicle that was just a bit reminiscent of a prison cell, by the impersonal but commanding voice of the intercom.

"George Kerrick," it said. "Please report as soon as possible to Mr. Welker's office."

CHAPTER IV

MR. WELKER'S OFFICE was at the top of what was known as the Exec Tower, a twenty-story structure rising above the north end of the flat main building that contained the living quarters, kitchens, hospital, recreation center, and some of the clerical departments. Exec housed the computers, the records storage banks, and the centers where cur-

rent data from all operating plants such as Island 6 were processed and evaluated. LEGAL and PLANING were here, and also ENGINEERING. So were the executive suites, unoccupied except during the visits of Mr. Jones and Mr. Lansing, and Mr. Welker's only slightly less sumptuous apartments.

The office itself was large and handsomely furnished in a sparse, stern way. The walls on all four sides were windows, so that Welker could sit up here like an old-time captain on the bridge of his ship, overlooking the whole plant from the primary pumping station where the sea-water was forced into the great vats, through the seemingly endless rows of fractionating tubes where the last atom of each mineral element was extracted, from the water, to the bulbous structure housing the end-point control system which fed back data in a continuous stream to the input control, keeping the whole cycle going. Beyond the plant, you could see on one side the gaunt black hulk of the fortress squatting on its hill, and on the other side the sea, a quiet vastness of pearl-gray silk by day, dappled with shifting tints of rose and purple and lavender and green and gold from floating weed or colored strata beneath the shallow water,

or from equally fleeting tints in the cloudy sky. At the horizon line sea and sky met in a luminous smother of mist, so that you had always the feeling of being imprisoned at the heart of a pale opal, or a pearl.

Kerrick had this feeling. He doubted that Welker felt anything except the powerful smooth forward-driving force of success, which meant getting what he wanted—higher production, higher pay, more praise, more power.

And Lella.

Welker was a tall big fine-looking man. His eyes were a bright hard blue and his features were likable at first glance, giving the impression of intelligence and a kind of alert humor. At second glance the essential coldness of the man became apparent, in the way he spoke and thought, in his total lack of any real warmth of friendliness. Not that Kerrick expected Welker to embrace him and invite him up to dinner. But Welker had a way of looking through people as though he considered them not worth the time it would take to notice them.

This time, when Kerrick walked in the office door, Welker noticed him. And Kerrick felt his insides coil together in a tight knot. *I'm in trouble*, he thought, *right up to my neck*.

And then he thought angrily, If the so-and-so jumps me I'll break his jaw for him.

Welker did not jump him. He smiled and said easily, "Good morning, Kerrick—you know Truby, don't you?"

Gil Truby, a lean little man who was a senior diver and one of the Company's best, got up off the edge of a chair where he had been sitting stiffly. He nodded to Kerrick, who said, "Hello, Gil."

Welker continued to look at Kerrick with a sharp icy stare that was quite independent of his smile and his pleasant voice.

"I've had excellent reports on you from Island 6," he said. "You seem to have passed your apprenticeship with flying colors."

He stopped and seemed to expect an answer, so Kerrick said, "I'm glad to hear it."

"In fact," said Welker, "I hear so well of you that I'm going to give you to Truby."

It sounded all right. The only thing wrong was the expression on Truby's face.

"But," said Truby. "But, Mr. Welker! That's totally unexplored bottom. A new man—"

"I'm sure Kerrick will learn rapidly." Welker's smile broadened for one brief moment and then was gone, and now his hard blue eyes were fastened on Truby, daring him to make any further pro-

tests. "I know it's short notice, but I want both of you on the survey boat going out this noon."

Truby hesitated. Then he said, "Yes, Mr. Welker."

Welker looked at Kerrick.

Kerrick said carefully, "Could I ask where the survey boat is going?"

"I thought I mentioned that," Welker said. "It's going to Island 10."

"Island 10," repeated Kerrick. His face tightened. "I see."

It figured Welker was hardly going to make any direct reference to last night's incident because mentioning it would admit his complicity, a thing that would not make him any more popular with Lella and probably not with her father either. But he would not want Kerrick around now. There was no telling how much the spy had heard before he was detected, and in any case Welker would make the blanket assumption that Thane and Lella and the herdsmen had outlined their viewpoints to him, probably including remarks potentially damaging to himself.

So Kerrick was being sent to Island 10, into dangerous and unknown waters, with the threat of the Grelvi added to the ever-present threat of the sea itself.

"The Company is expanding, Kerrick," Welker said, with his

cold little smile. "I'm giving you the opportunity to be in the forefront of that expansion."

"Thank you," said Kerrick stiffly, looking straight at him. "Will you issue guns to the party?"

"Guns?" said Welker, surprised.

"To fight the Grelvi. I understand they claim title to Island 10. They may object to our being there."

"The Grelvi!" said Welker angrily. "You've been listening to old wives' tales. The creatures aren't human, if they exist at all—have you ever seen one, Truby?"

"No, sir."

"And how can non-human beasts lay any claim to property?"

"That would be up to the Legal Department to say, Mr. Welker," Kerrick said.

"Then you let the Legal Department worry about it."

HE PRESSED a button on his desk and the office door opened. Truby started toward it thankfully, but Kerrick stood his ground.

"Will the Legal Department protect us in case we kill some of these non-human beasts? Just in case they should be proved intelligent and the lawful owners of the island."

Welker's face was taking on a

dangerous look. He leaned back in his chair and said quietly,

"Under the terms of your contract you are paid to dive, and nothing more. If you refuse an assignment I can place you under suspension for the period remaining on your contract—which means that you will not work for us nor for anyone else for three years. Are you refusing this one?"

"I wouldn't think of it," Kerrick said, and turned and walked out.

While they waited for the elevator down the hall, Truby shook his head. "And that's all you ever get, tangling with the Great Stone Face." He gave Kerrick a curious glance. "Did I detect something personal?"

Kerrick said, "Not exactly."

"Oh, well, it's none of my business. But what was all that stuff about the Grelvi?"

"Just something I heard."

The elevator came. They stepped into it and shot down.

"From where?" asked Truby.

"Fellow I met. An Earthman named Thane."

"Oh," said Truby. "Him."

"What do you mean, *him*?"

"He's—oh, you know." Truby made whirling motions beside his head. "A little bit touched. Been here so long he thinks he owns the place, and he's mucked around

with the fish so long he thinks they talk to him."

And Kerrick reflected that that might be perfectly true, and the attitude of Donavel's family toward the Grelvi merely native superstition.

He would have liked to think so, but somehow Thane had not struck him as unbalanced at all, and Donavel was a pretty hard-headed type.

They stepped out of the elevator.

"Listen," said Kerrick abruptly, "will you do me a favor? Will you check out my equipment for me? There's something I have to do in town."

Truby hesitated and then said, "Well, all right. But if you're late we'll both catch hell."

"I won't be late," Kerrick promised, and left the building.

Away from the building the heat was tremendous. He moved as in a steam bath, through air so heavy with moisture he felt he needed gills to breathe it. He could have checked out a Company jeep but he would have had to explain why and he did not have any good explanation. So he walked, across the plant yard with the omnipresent throbbing of the pumps like a huge booming heart and out the gate, and along the road past where the sea was all

roiled and fouled with the constant sucking of the great intakes.

By day the city looked older and more worn and weathered, the courtyards and narrow alleys simmering in the heat, the rooftops deserted. Children scurried about, as undaunted as young demons at play. Tall pale-haired women went on their way to the clamorous markets. Most of the men were already far out at sea, fishing or sea-herding or tending their floating farms.

Kerrick had some little difficulty finding the tenement again. When he did he ran up the worn steps in a great hurry, knowing that Donavel and Verilan would be away at sea but hoping that Thane might still be there.

He was puzzled to see Verilan's trident still on its rests over the door.

From inside there came a sound of weeping.

He pushed the door-curtain open and stepped hesitantly into the room. Verilan's young wife was huddled up on the platform with her baby in her laps and her two others on each side of her with her arms around them. They were all crying. The older woman sat by, staring grimly at nothing, a deep furrow between her brows.

Donavel's trident was still in its place, too.

"What is it?" asked Kerrick.
"What's happened?"

The younger woman did not raise her head. Donavel's wife turned slowly and looked at him with a black bitter look that made him flinch.

"This morning before dawn," she said, "the soldiers of the Lawmaker came and took my husband and my son away."

"But why?" asked Kerrick, shocked.

"Do you suppose they must explain to us? Oh, no. But I can tell you. It is because of last night, because of the spy who followed the royal daughter and saw her where she should not be, talking of things that were safer to be kept silent." Her voice rose, tight and shaking. "I told Donavel that this soft quiet way would only bring disaster. Rise and strike, I told him! Burn the Company, drag the Sulvini out of their villas and burn those too, and then the fortress. Shout the call among the fisher-folk, the sea-herds, the farmers, all the people of the quarter—they would follow, and gladly! But Thane and Lella said no, and Donavel listened to them and not to me."

She got up and took a step toward Kerrick.

"Now I tell you, *litharni*—get that red tunic out of here before some harm comes to you."

HER EYES SHONE with a light of murder. Kerrick did not blame her. It seemed that Welker must have passed on what he'd learned from his spy to the Lawmaker, doubtless concealing the way he had learned it.

"Please," said Kerrick. "I must see Thane. Where—"

"He went early to see the Lawmaker, to see if he could get Donavel and my son released. But he has not come back."

Kerrick said, "When he does come back, tell him I'm being sent out to Island 10 and—"

"Ah!" screamed the woman. "Ah—ah! The Grelvi will be waiting there for you! Feed them, *litharni*—fatten them and make them strong as they were in the old days, when the Sulvini cowered before them!"

There was something inexpressibly shocking about her sudden cry. To Kerrick, it was as though she spoke with the deep and ancient voice of this brooding planet, of whose secrets Earthmen had only touched the fringes. He was abruptly and powerfully stricken by the awareness, always before thrust tidily back into his subconscious, that he stood upon a world that was not Earth, a world unearthly.

"Then we shall see!" she cried. "Then we shall watch a slaying!"

It was only too obvious that he would get nothing more from her, and Kerrick was glad to retreat back down the steps.

As he reached the ground a strong hand fell upon his shoulder. He whirled, and then recognized the tall, strong-looking Venusian who faced him.

Harn. Lella's servant. For a moment an unreasoning hope thrilled Kerrick. Then Harn said,

"I have a message for you—from Thane."

"Thane? Where is he?"

"In the Lawmaker's prison," said Harn flatly. "I was to give his message to one of Donavel's women to bear to you, but now—"

"In prison?" Kerrick was startled. "What's the message?"

Harn said carefully, "If you want to repay your debt to me, get word somehow to the Grelvi where I am."

Kerrick felt a little staggered. He did owe Thane a debt—his life. And, ironically, the fact that Welker was sending him to Island 10 might make it easier to carry out Thane's request. But Thane hadn't known he was going out there. Why hadn't he asked Harn himself to take the message?

He asked that question, and Harn's face became utterly stony. He said, "No Venusian goes near the Grelvi unless they bid him

come."

So that was it. Superstitious fear or superstitious reverence, so strong whichever it was that Thane had despaired of finding a Venusian messenger.

Kerrick asked, "What *are* the Grelvi, Harn?"

Harn gave him a level look and then said, "You have the message," and turned his back and stalked off.

From the window over Kerrick's head came the voice of Donavel's wife still raised in muffled, bitter outcry, in wild and vengeful prophecy.

Kerrick shivered and turned away.

CHAPTER V

IT WAS NIGHT on Island 10. Kerrick moved, cautious as a stalking cat and as quiet, past the row of plastic huts where the men were sleeping. Fog hung like a dense blue cloud over the island, drowning the lights until they were no more than candle-flames, muffling sound. It lay on the lungs like smoke and it smelled of strangeness, a haunting, frightening breath out of the unknown.

Kerrick thought with passionate regret of the lighted interior of the bare little hut he shared with Truby. But he kept on going,

treading softly over the damp ground.

It was still. Now at night when all the noisy activities of building were shut down, the stillness was appalling. Unless there was a gale or a solar tide to drive it, there was seldom surf to pound the Venusian beaches anyway, so that to an Earthman there was always something uncanny about the quiet of the Venusian sea. But this was different. Kerrick could *feel* the water crowding around the tiny crescent-shaped island. He could hear it breathe, and touch, and tremble with a kind of vast eager waiting.

He passed the last of the huts and groped his way across a patch of open ground toward the beach.

Things had not been right since they had landed. On the first day he and Truby had been sent down to explore the configuration of the ocean floor on the east side of the island, so that Canforra, the engineer in charge, could decide which was the best location for his intake tubes. On that day the warm shallow waters had swarmed with the normal thousands of weird and brightly-colored creatures, swimming, creeping, and squirming among the painted mosses and gorgeous weed.

The second day they had gone down for samples of the bottom so

that Canforra could decide whether the mud was rich enough in minerals to be worth the extra expense of an agitator installation. On this day every swimming and creeping and squirming thing was gone. The mossy pastures and the weed forests were empty and deserted. Kerrick and Truby had stayed close together, looking nervously around as they swam at the eery thickets that swayed in the silent water, sensing an ominous and terrible threat lurking somewhere just out of sight.

It had stayed out of sight. But on the third day the weed began to die all around the island in a ring, and every day the ring widened, and the men who were on watch at night said they had seen strange lights moving in the water, deep down, and that far out in the fog great voices had spoken, and that there were ripples and eddies along the beaches where there was no current to make them.

Canforra, who was an able engineer and as hard as one of his own plastic foundations, used a few brief impolite words and told them that the installation on Island 10 was going up on schedule in spite of all the lights and noises their imaginations could invent.

And it was going up. More and more equipment arrived every day

in long strings of barges. The face of the island had already changed. On the east side a portable pumping station was in place, ready to feed the testing vats, and as Kerrick approached the beach he passed the pre-fab shed that housed the vats and the test fractionator that had arrived only today.

Lights were going inside the shed. The technicians must be working overtime to get the fractionator fully assembled and working. Kerrick skirted the building cautiously, pausing just long enough to glance through a window.

He could see the machine, much smaller than the permanent single-function ones that would replace it. It was pretty big even so, a square blue metallic box about eight feet high and perhaps five feet on a side, surmounted by four gigantic red insulators, a weird-looking coil, and a network of cables. These were being hooked up with a portable atomic power-pack of the type that provided power for all purposes on the island.

On its face was a graph indicator, at the top, and a series of controls that governed the action of the huge multi-faceted crystal lens that dominated the front of the panel. In use a heavy shield was fitted over the lens, channelling the powerful radiation emitted

from it through a small aperture. The controls were set before operation began and were not thereafter touched until the operation was finished and the fractionator shut down.

The fractionating-rays, so called, could be "tuned" to a particular element, so that they separated the atoms of that element from a volume of sea-water as it passed through the exposed vat, in a kind of "settling" action. This method, made possible by increased control of atomic power and a broader use of the electromagnetic impulses for new effects, had been an enormous improvement over the old-fashioned methods of mineral extraction by evaporation, exchange-resins, or even chromatographic absorption, which was its remote grandfather, allowing as it had for the selective removal of minerals at different points of an absorbing column. The fractionators had made sea-mining really practical on a huge scale.

The technicians were working languidly in the hotshed, taking great care with the fractionator because if anything went wrong with it they would be the ones who would be right in the front line for destruction. The things were perfectly capable of fractionating people as well as water. But they were not hurrying about it, and

they obviously had not heard Kerrick. He decided they were no threat and crept on his way across the foggy beach.

HE COULD NOT see the dock but he knew it must be ahead of him, and he knew there was a lookout on it, so that he must not make any noise. The shed that held the diving gear was about midway between the test-shed and the dock. He set his feet softly, softly in the wet sand, and a little lapping tendril of water came as warm as blood against his ankles and touched them, and withdrew. Kerrick started wildly.

Then he shook his head and went on. He had been kept too busy the first few days to go looking for Grelvi, and he had believed anyway that the Grelvi would come to the island, make some kind of contact with the intruders if only to warn them away. Instead, every kind of life had been withdrawn from the surrounding seas, as though the island was being isolated preparatory to some uncanny but overwhelming doom.

Something—instinct perhaps, or a process of reasoning too obscure to recognize—told Kerrick that he must not wait any longer, not only for Thane's sake but for his own, and that included the rest of the men on Island 10.

A surface of smooth plastic, greasy with damp, met his outstretched fingers. This would be the shed. He followed the wall with his hand, around the corner and on until he felt the edge of a door. He opened it silently, and stepped inside, pulling it to behind him.

The shed had no windows to leak out a betraying glow. He snapped on a tiny pocket-torch and began to collect and check his gear with nervous haste. He wanted to get going before his nerve ran out.

He had it all stacked together when the door opened and Truby came in.

"I had a hunch I'd find you here," he said, giving Kerrick a tight-faced, angry look.

Kerrick damned him. "I thought you were asleep."

"I woke up. Okay, Kerrick, tell me. What the hell are you up to?"

"I'll tell you when I get back."

"You'll tell me right now. You've been acting funny ever since we got here, like you had something on your mind, and I guess you have. You know what Canforra told me this evening?"

"No," said Kerrick, shifting his weight and sweating. "What?"

"He said for me to keep an eye on you. He said he got word straight from Welker, by a guy that came in on the barges today."

"Didn't he give you orders to

cut my oxygen-tube or put lead weights in my sample-pouch?" asked Kerrick bitterly.

Truby looked uncomfortable. "No he didn't. And I'll tell you, Kerrick, I don't feel good about the whole thing. I like you personally. But I can't dive with a guy I don't trust, and the way things are looking it may not be just me, it's all the guys in camp."

"That's just it. Listen, Truby, I have to go out there and try—"

"Try what?" asked Truby. "To save your own skin while the rest of us get slaughtered? You're Thane's pal, he'd take care of you. Maybe you're even—hey! Of course that's it." Truby's eyes blazed. "You're carrying a message from him to his stinking little pets out there."

"Suppose I am," said Kerrick quietly. "I thought everybody was convinced the Grelvi weren't important even if they existed."

"It looks like we were wrong," Truby said, moving imperceptibly backward toward the door. "I talked to this guy myself. He brought in a load of guns with him—it'll be all over camp tomorrow, you can't keep a thing like that quiet for long. He said—"

"What did he say?" asked Kerrick, moving a little forward, his hands loose and swinging at his sides.

Truby's gaze flicked uneasily from him to the door, measuring distance.

"He said when Welker got Canforra's report he spoke to the Lawmaker, and the Lawmaker spoke to Thane—he's in the fortress, or did you know that?—and Thane said the Grelvi were giving us a warning to clear out and if we didn't—"

He whirled and jumped for the door, and Kerrick jumped after him.

He caught Truby around the waist and they fell together through the door and as they went down Truby yelled with all the piercing power of his lungs.

Kerrick pounded him fiercely. "Shut up," he snarled. "Shut up, you fool, don't you know I'm the only chance you have of living?" But it was too late. There was a shout from the dock and more shouting from the test-shed. Truby thrashed around, fighting furiously. His feet drummed into Kerrick's middle, his hands punched and clawed and hung on. Kerrick had no time for the niceties. He liked Truby, but not enough to die to save him a headache. He pulled the weighted cord Thane had given him out of his tunic and rapped Truby over the crown with it, and Truby became quiet.

Kerrick pulled him into the shed,

grabbed up the stack of gear in his arms, being desperately careful to leave nothing behind, and snapped off the little torch.

Then he listened.

The fog had distorted Truby's cry somewhat. There were a number of people moving about with lights and shouting to one another, trying to find where that cry had come from. Kerrick frowned, breathing heavily. Then he slipped out, carrying the gear, and closed the shed door. Moving with enormous care, he headed back toward the test-shed, keeping close to the water and watching the erratic gleaming of lights in the thick mist.

AMONG THE TANGLED mess of machinery and material attendant upon the construction of a permanent pumping station beyond the temporary erection at the far end of the shed, Kerrick thought he might find a shelter long enough to get into his diving outfit. He had to get off the island now whether he wanted to or not. Welker had warned Canforra about him, and when Truby came to and talked they would be sure he was carrying a message from Thane to the Grelvi—which he was, but he didn't think they would believe him when he explained what the message was. He thought that, as

nervous as they were now and bad as things were beginning to look, they might very probably kill him right on the spot.

He thought that that would be a very nice clean way for Welker to get rid of him, if he wanted to. And he also thought that if Welker was sending guns to Island so he must be getting really worried.

And if Welker had become suddenly really worried about the Grelvi, animals or not, Thane's warning must have been impressive. Kerrick thought that things were probably worse back on the main island than even Truby's "guy" was telling.

Could even the power of Thane's name hold these mysterious creatures in check now?

Whether it would or not, he had to try. Otherwise a lot of good men like Truby would die, who were not to blame for any of it.

He had almost reached the test-shed, and almost decided he was safe, when he saw a light on the beach ahead of him, between the shed and the sea, and in the same instant a voice cried out behind him that Truby had been found and some of the gear was missing.

"—diver!" came the muffled cry, full of urgency. "Don't let him get away!"

And the word *Grelvi* echoed mistily from light to bobbing light.

and the voices were full of fear.

Kerrick checked and turned, thinking perhaps he could slip past the test-shed on the landward side. But there were lights there, too, moving toward him, and somebody yelled, "There he is! There he is, stop him!"

The open door of the shed was close by, throwing a beam of light into the fog. The long room inside looked to be empty. Kerrick ran into it.

Feet pounded. Voices clamored. Kerrick went leaping down the long room past the vat installations, toward the looming bulk of the fractionator. He had a start on the men behind him and he might have made it out the other end of the shed. But a man came in through another door just beyond the fractionator and sprang at him, swinging a length of pipe like a club.

Kerrick dropped his bundle and grabbed the pipe with both hands as it whistled toward his head. He shortened his grip on it, wrestling the man around, almost banging into the naked lens of the fractionator. Now he could see the others running down the shed toward them. A high harsh voice was screaming insistently, "Kill him! He was going to bring the Grelvi down on us!" The men ran as excited and wild as a pack of young

hounds.

The man on the other end of the pipe wrenched frantically to free it. His eyes bulged with fear and rage. "You're in with the Grelvi," he panted. "Trying to kill us all—"

Kerrick hit him desperately on the jaw, snapping his head back. His grip loosened a little on the pipe. Kerrick planted a foot in his belly and pushed. Out of the corner of his eye he saw someone dart in behind the fractionator. The high harsh voice was still screaming, but now it said, "I'll get the bastard! Look out, I'll get him—" The man let go of the pipe and staggered back and Kerrick flung the pipe over his head at the man beyond him, who had now stopped. The pipe was still in the air, the man was still staggering back, and Kerrick was still in the act of turning when it happened.

There was a hum of power as someone opened the master switch. The unshielded lens of the fractionator flared into sudden savage color, yellow and orange like a great evil jewel. A stream of radiation burst from it.

Kerrick was almost directly in front of the fractionator. The man he had pushed away was already past the lens, on one side of it. The radiation should have hit Kerrick full on and left the other man

untouched. But the multi-faceted lens was still not coordinated with the series of focusing mirrors behind it. The burst of radiation was directed obliquely to one side instead of to the front. In the space of a second or less it caught the man and stripped the soft substances of flesh and blood away from the bones above his waist, so that, for an instant he stood there as a dreadful half-skeleton mounted on strong normal legs that were still walking. Then the bones began to crumble and the legs collapsed and a terrible cry went up from the men on the other side of the machine.

Sick and stunned, Kerrick fled away out the door through which that unlucky man had come to find his death. Only instinct made him reach down and pick up the bundle of diving gear as he passed it. He could hear the men inside shouting with a heavy sound of horror in their voices. The sounds got fainter. Nobody followed him. Apparently shock had stopped them dead for the moment. Kerrick plunged in among the machines and stacked-up piles of material in the construction area.

When he came to the water's edge he stripped in a frantic hurry and pulled on the harness with the oxygen-pack and the small battery-powered propulsion unit.

The powerful underwater lamp he clipped to the belt of his trunks, and he was careful to secure Thane's weighted cord there too, where he could get at it in a hurry. Then he thrust his feet into the light plastic fins, settled the breathing tube in his mouth, and adjusted the mask.

He was all ready. The sea lay before him, a vast silence, a dark entity wrapped in the purple mist, under a starless, moonless sky.

Somewhere out there, beyond the ever-widening ring of death they had set around the island, the Grelvi waited.

Kerrick shivered once. Then he took the shock-spear in his hand and went quickly into the water.

CHAPTER VI

THE BOTTOM here was a wide shelving bowl without obstruction. Kerrick swam straight ahead without any light until he was sure he was far enough away from the dock to make shooting inaccurate, in case someone should see the offshore glow through a rift in the fog.

The water was warm and caressing on his shin, and very dark. He hated it. The undersea world was his world and he was as much at home in it as a fish. But now, for the first time in his life, he

felt that the sea was something to be hated and feared.

No, not the sea. *This* sea—as alien and different from Earth's blue cold waters as the land was different from his native Ohio.

It was no better when he switched on the belt-lamp. The diffuse globe of light it projected around him dispelled the immediate darkness but it also showed up the withered blackened weed and the dead moss, the utter emptiness of the water in which no living thing moved except himself.

He switched on the propulsion unit and plunged deeper and farther into the dark sea, trailing a plume of silver bubbles behind him.

The smooth bowl-like formation broke up, showing deeper rifts and higher, rougher peaks, until Kerrick was moving along the black slot of a valley between walls of rock that gave back a wet glistening where his light touched them. And everywhere there was the emptiness and dead desolation.

It came to him that this must be the power of the Grevli that the land-people feared so much. All their livelihood depended on the sea. If the Grevli could sweep the waters clear of life there would be no fish for the nets, no pasture for the scaly herds, no plants in the sea-fields of the farmers. The land-people would starve and die.

He went on, letting the propulsion unit do most of the work so that he could conserve his own strength and his vital oxygen-supply. He did not know how long this mission would take him. He did not even know whether the Grevli were air-breathers, or how they lived, or how he was going to communicate with them.

Doubtless he would find out—if they let him live that long.

He passed out of the area he had explored with Truby. And now he began to encounter reefs of fantastic shape and coloring, some of them standing up like walls from the ocean floor clear up into open air above the surface, others guarding little level stretches of sand or merely standing about as castles or weird animals or abstract shapes.

Suddenly, across a line as sharp as if it had been cut with a mower's sickle, there was life again.

The bright strange colors of moss and weed shone back at him in the lamp's glare. The naked reefs were clothed in wavering thickets of purple and bronze and gold. Wide eyes peered at him in luminous amazement, sometimes in scattered pairs and sometimes by the hundreds all at once, and there was a constant flicking and shining of bodies, moving, turning, vanishing.

Kerrick went on, threading his way more slowly and carefully now among the tumbled reefs and rocks.

After a while he noticed that while weed and moss were still flourishing richly, the mobile life was gone again.

He cut off the propulsion unit and drifted with the idle current, looking from side to side. He did not see anything and yet he was seized with a strange uneasiness.

Reef and rock and weed, all empty and silent in the dark water.

Kerrick thought that things were moving beyond the circle of his light.

Uneasiness turned rapidly to a cold panic.

He fought it down. There was no escape and he knew it. So instead of doing either of the things he wanted to do, which were to swim madly away or else break for the surface and some scrap of dry land, he forced himself to come down quietly on a stretch of clear sand, balancing upright with finny leapings and bowings like a grotesque ballet dancer. He laid down the electric spear and took Thane's weighted cord from his belt and held it up.

And waited.

There was a rush and a swirl above his head. Swift, powerful, terrifying, and splendid, a great golden shape split the water in a

smother of silver bubbles, passed over, and was gone. The turbulence and his own instinctive recoil sent Kerrick spinning. When he regained his balance he realized that Thane's cord was gone, too.

Once more he stood and waited.

All at once there was light, immensely more powerful than his own. It illuminated the whole area where he stood, as bright as a little sun.

HE MADE himself breathe slowly and evenly, counting. One, two. In, out. The weed waved with gentle grace along the edges of the light. His body waved too, giving itself to the massive rhythm of the sea. One, two. In, out. And nothing came, nothing showed itself.

Then he saw them.

There were two of them. There must have been a third one with the light, unless it was resting on a ledge of rock, but two were all that Kerrick saw. They swam toward him through the brilliant water, their bodies all shining gold. They were man-shaped except that their hands and feet were modified for swimming, and except that they must have been fully nine feet tall, slender, sleek, and terribly strong. They were obviously air-breathers, and warm-blooded. They looked at Kerrick with great

black luminous eyes, full of a quick but quite alien intelligence, and Kerrick shuddered a little where he stood, as though something cold had brushed across him.

One of the Grelvi carried Thane's cord in his hand.

Kerrick raised both his own hands to show that they were empty of weapons. The Grelvi carried none either, but he suspected that the metal tubes in their girdles—their only article of clothing outside of their own sleek golden fur—probably included quite good weapons. They would not need to use them on him. They could tear him to pieces easily enough with their long webbed fingers.

They came swiftly one on each side of him and grasped his arms, and Kerrick's flesh shrank away from that alien contact. Once more panic almost overcame him, but before he could think about it he was rushed up toward the surface at a speed that left him dizzy from the buffeting of the water. They broke in a smother of spray and foam and the Grelvi blew like seals, and then one of them spoke in a great deep voice that boomed on Kerrick's ear like the very voice of the sea itself.

"Why have you come here, bearing Thane's weapon?"

Kerrick got the breather out of

his mouth, and answered in the same land-Venusian speech, which was as foreign to his tongue as it was to the Grelvi's.

"He gave me that as a token because it bears his stamp. I bring a message from Thane."

They swirled and bobbed in the purple water, like great golden fish.

"What is the message?"

"Thane is a prisoner in the fortress of the Lawmaker."

The Grelvi stiffened and made a deep sighting of rage and sorrow. They spoke briefly between themselves, in their own language. Then they said to Kerrick,

"Come."

Once more they grasped him and he had barely time to get his mouthpiece back in before they were boiling away with him between them, leaving long streaks of phosphorescence behind them. Theoretically they were swimming on the surface, but they were under it as often as not and no human lung capacity could match theirs unaided any more than Kerrick's human frame could match theirs for speed and strength. He let them tow him, and it was like being carried between two power boats only there was no sound but the rush of water. After a while, in spite of himself, he began to enjoy it.

Presently they rolled high out of the water, filling their lungs for a long dive. Kerrick caught a last glimpse of the surface, mist-shrouded as always, and then the Grelvi plunged down and down in a slanting rush and there was a light on the bottom of the sea, pale and clear as a drowned star, and the light was low in the face of a great dark wall that filled all the watery horizon—a huge reef, Kerrick thought, and felt his heart pounding with fear and excitement. The Grelvi shot straight for the light and past it into a wide tunnel that had guide-lights set along the way. To Kerrick the lights were no more than a fleeting blur and then the Grelvi surfaced again and they were in a wide circular place of light, so beautiful and strange that Kerrick forgot his fear in looking at it.

The water glowed, as though from sources underneath, a luminous circle only lightly touched with mist. All around it the reef rose like the mighty walls of a castle never dreamed by any man of Earth. The eroded, wind-carved rock took the form of battlements, of turrets and spires too fanciful for any human architect, and all the walls and battlements were pierced with light that shone through windowed galleries and tall arches. There was a sound of

laughter and of music, and that too was in no way human.

THE GRELVI SWAM with Kerrick onto a sloping ledge of rock that led up out of the water. They shook themselves and Kerrick removed his mask and breather, kicking off the fins that were ludicrously clumsy on land. They led him up the ledge and through a tall bright doorway into a space that was half a cave and half an anteroom. Against one wall a set of diving gear was already neatly arranged. Thane's, of course. They waited while he shrugged out of his own harness and put it beside the other.

Then they led him along a passage and into a very large cave enlarged still further and shaped by hand, with a long gallery open onto the lagoon. There were a number of Grelvi here, men and women both, talking together with a tense air of excitement, while a tall golden girl sang a song as fierce and lovely as the angry sea, accompanied by a harsh wild piping.

"She sings of old battles," said Kerrick's escort, "and of the new ones which are to be, tomorrow."

In the water the Grelvi were born creatures of the sea, but on land they took on the attributes of men. They wore garments of bright

cloth and they adorned themselves with pearl and moonstone and ornaments of sea-ivory. Their women were superb, if one could get used to their oddly unhuman faces, but Kerrick thought that any Earthman would be frightened to death of these huge golden Junos.

He was. He was frightened of all of them. He felt small and wet and inadequate standing there in his trunks and his naked white skin while they all stared at him and began to rise and come forward, and the singing stopped.

There was a great booming and roaring of Grelvi voices. Kerrick caught Thane's name and then another one that sounded like "Zeehn," repeated several times. More and more Grelvi began to pour in from other entrances until the cave-chamber was packed with crowding nine-foot bodies, in all shades of gold from near-white to red-tawny, all looking down with their black strange eyes at Kerrick.

One of his escort bent and said, "You will speak to Zeehn, who is chief among us."

He thrust Kerrick ahead of him along another passage and the whole crowd followed.

The passage ended in a mammoth chamber that must have taken the full width of the reef. The veined greenish-black stone of

the walls had been polished to a mirror-like smoothness and inlaid in regular panels with symbols of hammered gold, so that the place had a look of sombre splendor. At one end a huge coiling figure that Kerrick took to be symbolic of the ocean was carved in high relief, stretching great arms as though to embrace and protect. Between those arms was a slab of stone—royal table and altar all in one, Kerrick thought, and obviously very ancient. In the middle of the table, built of bright pebbles, was a pretty little island with its attendant rocks, surrounded by concentric rings of ash.

Island 10.

Seven Grelvi sat around the table, planning, drawing with their fingers in the ashes, lines of approach and attack. They stopped when Kerrick and the crowd came in and six of them Kerrick glanced at and forgot.

The seventh was Zeehn.

All the Grelvi looked liked kings and queens. Keehn looked like a god. He was still strong and vigorous but his tawny fur was touched with white and his eyes held a deep wisdom. The word "noble" came into Kerrick's mind. Zeehn was a noble creature indeed, and Kerrick thought that when he set his face toward destruction he would be as noble and as ruth-

lessly terrible as a typhoon.

There was more talk in the mighty passionate voices of the seafolk. Zeehn listened brooding hugely above the little pebble island that represented the lives of a hundred and twenty-four men, looking hard at Kerrick. When the talk was done he said, "Speak."

Kerrick spoke. His voice sounded thin and ridiculous in his ears after the organ-tones of the Grelvi.

"And that was all the message," he finished. "Tell the Grelvi where I am.' Now I've told you. And now I have a message of my own."

One of the councillors started to speak but Zeehn raised his hand.

"Say it, Earthman."

Kerrick pointed to the little island, isolated in its ashen rings.

"The men of Island 10 are men like me. They are not responsible for the violation of your boundaries, and it will gain you nothing if you kill them."

There was a rumbling mutter as Grelvi who understood the land-speech translated for those who did not.

Slowly, Zeehn shook his massive golden head.

"They are intruders. They must die. As you would die instantly, if you were not Thane's messenger. As you may still die."

"Well," said Kerrick, "and what of Thane? What would he say to your attack on Island 10?"

"Thane is our friend and brother. He is one of us. But he is not our chief, he does not make our decisions. We will destroy the island at dusk tomorrow if your people have not left by then."

"And," said Kerrick, "before the night is over, your friend and brother Thane will die."

HIS HEART was beating wildly and his voice threatened to show a betraying quaver, but he glared up as haughtily as he could into the eyes of Zeehn.

Zeehn bent forward. "How and why?"

"The Lawmaker is holding him as hostage for your actions," Kerrick said. He did not know that this was true, but it was perfectly possible, and even if it was not true now it might well be later, in the sense that a panicky people might well kill Thane in reprisal for any Grelvi attack. Anyway, it was the only weapon he had and he used it.

"If you strike Island 10, you kill Thane and you don't even touch your real enemies, who are the Lawmaker and the Earthman Welker. Those two between them will keep on until they devour you as they are devouring their own

people—unless you fight them with wisdom and cunning as well as courage.”

Several of the councillors and a large number of the Grelvi now roared at Zeehn, advising him to kill this creature at once and get on with the attack.

“He only wishes to save his comrades!”

“Which is more than you seem to want to do!” he said heatedly. “Thane went in to the Lawmaker to fight for your rights and because of that he’s a prisoner, and yet you care so little for your ‘brother’ that you won’t even think about saving him.”

Kerrick was working up a fine head of steam, not only for Thane and Island ro but for himself.

“If you’re so anxious to fight, why not strike at the head where it’ll do some good, instead of at an isolated island? How long has it been since you Grelvi have gone outside your reefs?”

That question took Zeehn by surprise.

“Not since the boundaries were set.”

“A lot has happened since then. Didn’t Thane tell you?”

“He has told us many things,” said Zeehn. “Of worlds beyond this one—many things. Our wise men have put them into books. They are of great interest, but they

do not affect our lives.”

“Oh yes they do,” said Kerrick. “The chief men on those other worlds have made laws which protect you from just exactly what’s happening to you now. The heads of the Company—Welker’s chiefs—are far away on Earth, but they control him. They could stop him instantly from invading your land, on Island ro or anywhere else. And if they refuse to listen, there are powers above them that will *make* them listen. All it requires is some proof of your ancient claim to these seas, and one message across space to Earth.”

“Proof we have,” said Zeehn quietly. “What is your plan?”

“Get Thane safely out of the fortress and then join with the land-people, whose cause is much the same as yours, to force the Lawmaker and the rest of the Sulvini to make new treaties and honor them. And I will send a message through to Earth.”

He could do that, if once the Grelvi and the ordinary folk of the land—Donavel’s party—were in power. The Lawmaker and his guards would no longer be able to censor and control all communication to the outside. And what he had told Zeehn about the laws was true: The Interplanetary Code required that all activities be carried on under strict legal regu-

lation and with the full consent of the native peoples involved.

Welker and the Lawmaker were getting by with it because the Lawmaker claimed Island 10 and therefore the right to lease it. Once the Grelvi came forward the whole business would be investigated, and any violation of their rights would bring thunder and lightning on the heads of those responsible. Especially Welker. And Kerrick would not be unhappy about that. He was convinced that it was Welker's man, back there on the island, who had thrown the switch on the fractionator.

He waited for an answer.

There was a second roar of protest, perhaps not quite so loud as the first. Someone cried, "How can we trust this alien that he is not lying to lead us into a trap?"

Zeehn's wise strange eyes lit with a very cold light. "We have his life as a guarantee."

He reached out one massive hand and scattered the pebbles of the tiny island on the table. Then he rose.

"We will rescue Thane. It will be as it was in the old time, when our fathers made the Sulvini tremble. After that, we will see. The Earthman's way may prove good. And in any case, there is always time for killing."

An hour later they were on their way.

CHAPTER VII

THE TIME that followed was, to Kerrick, a dizzy mixture of nightmare and wild, glorious dream.

He swam with the Grelvi. Their line was flung out in two long slanting wings, a wedge with Zeehn at the apex, the point of honor. They clove the midnight ocean like the point of a mighty spear, leaving behind them a wake of burning phosphorescence and a trembling in the weed. The same two men that had brought Kerrick to the reef-city had charge of him again, and they kept him close behind Zeehn.

At dawn, when the splintered sunlight was sifting downward through the layers of cloud like a rain of soft fire, the Grelvi raised an island with shelving beaches and shallow bays choked with many-colored weed. And here the line was broken, some of the Grelvi remaining in the water, strung out in a broad half-circle, while others raced on to the island.

The men who were with Kerrick quivered with excitement as they waited, very quiet in the water. One of them whispered, "Watch now—and be ready—"

Flights of queer piscene birds rose flashing from the weed as the

Grelvi came. And then all along the beaches there was a stirring, and a grunting and bellowing, and Kerrick saw great bodies moving on the sand and realized that this way a rookery of the Venusian sea-elephant, amphibians half as big as whales.

"Watch now," whispered the Grelvi next to him. "Here, take this, and stay close by us."

He put one of the small metal tubes the Grelvi all carried into Kerrick's hand and showed him how to press a notched trigger—one place for light, two places to stun, three to kill. Kerrick remembered the oil-wood torches they still used on land and thought it was about time the Grelvi came out of their reefs and shared some of their knowledge.

The roaring and bellowing of the huge beasts on the island rose to a crescendo of alarm. Suddenly at both ends of the long curving beach the golden Grelvi emerged from the weed onto the land and ran swiftly behind the herd, shouting in harsh peculiar cries.

The man next to Kerrick laughed. "They hear," he said, "and understand, but they do not like to obey. They are lazy, the big ones."

The big ones began to move in a long reluctant ragged line, shuffling ponderously down the sand

toward the water.

The Grelvi ran among them, shouting, slapping their colossal gray flanks.

The ponderous shuffle quickened, became a lunging, a clumsy gallop. The Grelvi voices rose like bugles above the heavy bellowing. The huge bodies began to hit the water, lashing geysers of spray, tearing out into the weed. Fifty, a hundred, two hundred—Kerrick could no longer see the beach and the shallow bay was a roiling smother of spume and there was a sound of thunder in the sea.

The herd came out of the bay.

"Now!" screamed the man next to Kerrick. "Keep them from spreading—*hai!*"

A huge gray face appeared out of the smother, wild-eyed, with an indignant gaping mouth. The man yelled to Kerrick again but Kerrick could not hear what he was saying and now all the water was full of enormous heads and huge bodies rolling. He saw lights flicker and flash all down the line and he flashed his and some of the creatures blinked and recoiled but others were more stubborn. The powerful Grelvi were darting among the flanks of the herd, in great enjoyment, laying about them with their hands and shouting. Kerrick did not think he was big enough or fast enough for that

kind of work. A thoroughly angry bull came churning at him, looming up as big as a mountain, determined to break through the line. Kerrick notched the trigger up to the second position and aimed the now-invisible beam squarely at the creature's massive frontal bone.

The bull gave a kind of grunt, rolled half over and lay still for a moment and then swam slowly back into the herd.

The Grelvi from the beach had rejoined the others, and the herd was held together and driven out to sea.

ALL THAT DAY the Grelvi drove the colossal beasts, and in the afternoon they came upon the floating camp of the ordinary sea-herders from the mainland. The men fell down prone on their raft and covered their faces while the Grelvi passed.

They swept on, toward the fortress island.

They passed seafarmers tending their floating fields of edible weed, and the mighty herd scattered the fields, and the farmers fled in their tiny boats out to sea, wanting no part of what was about to happen to the island.

They passed a fishing fleet, and the fishermen fled too. And Zeehn said to Kerrick, "They are all far out from their former grounds. Is

this the Earthmen's doing?"

Kerrick said, "I'm afraid so."

They avoided the little islands where the sea-mining installations were. The Grelvi did not want word to travel ahead of them and they understood that the Earthmen could send it. But they could see even so how the ocean currents were fouled and muddied, how the weed was dying and all the underwater creatures gone.

Zeehn said, "No matter what Thane says, I think we will kill you all. This is an abomination."

Kerrick said, "There's an awful lot of ocean, and I don't think the land-people would mind if they got something out of it, in schools and hospitals and better ways of living. But the Sulvini take it all and they get nothing."

Zeehn grunted. The herd groaned and protested with mighty belowings, finding the taste of the water evil. So did the Grelvi find it. But they went on.

Night fell, and there were dim prickings of light ahead in the gathering mist.

A fierce kind of sigh ran through the ranks of the Grelvi and the pace quickened. They drove the herd faster and faster, pricking them on with strange cries that seemed to communicate a sense of urgency to the great beasts so that they began to churn and shoulder

through the water as though their lives depended on it. Faster and still faster they went with the Grelvi behind them, and Kerrick, fighting in the smother of the wake, noticed how subtly the cries of the Grelvi changed until they were communicating not merely urgency but sheer panic to the herd.

And now the speed of their going was such that Kerrick was dazed and blinded by it. His two guardians towed him as before, and when they were high out of the water he could see the vast turmoil of the herd ahead, a welter of foam and huge gray backs rushing like a tidal wave across the sea, and when they were under the surface there was only the dark impact of the water that threatened to tear the breather from his mouth and the harness from his back. But he was not afraid. The motion, the cries, the headlong stampede filled him with a wild excitement.

A shadowy bulk of hill and harbor loomed in the purple night. The lights were bright in the haze. Kerrick made out the two headlands of the harbor, the isolated glare that came from the Jones & Lansing plant, the small craft tossing violently at their moorings as the still water was churned into a maelstrom by the passing herd.

He saw, dimly through the spray, the crowded mass of buildings in the harbor quarter and the black citadel crowning the hill. He wondered if Lella was up there now. He hoped she was. For now the terrible bellowing of the giant sea-herd echoed back from the island, and he thought that beneath that thunderous sound there were thin cries of human panic.

Then they hit the beach.

The ranks of the sea-beasts went first, spreading wide as the Grelvi continued to drive them from behind but let them go forward in any direction they would. Wave on wave of them pounded and thrashed across the sand, onto the quays, into the streets, mad with a fear they did not understand, and the Grelvi would not let them rest.

Kerrick found himself on solid ground. He began to tear off his mask and harness. His guards shook their dripping bodies close beside him and he saw a compact party of ten or more gathering around them and one of them was Zeehn.

"Come," said Zeehn, and Kerrick ran with them, stretching his legs to keep up with them.

And now it was more nightmare than dream.

All along the quays the torches were out, torn down and trampled

under huge frantic bodies. Windows and doors were smashed in, the Watching God of the sea-wall was overturned, beached craft were obliterated. And still the Grelvi drove the herd bellowing through the streets, and on all the rooftops people screamed and wept and cried for mercy to the golden lords of the sea.

Kerrick ran with Zeehn and his party.

THEY PASSED through a market place, wrecked and shattered in the wake of the stampede, and burst up out of the steepening streets into the gardens of the Sulvini. And now the herd was tiring, and the soldiers of the Lawmaker came down from the citadel.

"Drive them! Drive them!"

Zeehn roared, and the Grelvi drove the huge beasts on through the dark gardens, among the rocking trees. The soldiers had lances and slings and a few guns which they had from the Earthmen. The indolent tyranny under which these people had lived so long had not encouraged advances in military science any more than it had encouraged peaceful learning, and the Sulvini preferred to keep even its own soldiery from becoming too strong. And now Kerrick understood fully while the Grelvi had used the herd.

The guns killed sometimes, but more often only wounded, and lance and sling merely stung the huge creatures to homicidal fury. Suddenly they did not need to be driven. They saw an enemy, something they could attack and punish. They lunged forward, their roarings rising to a kind of whistling scream. They went into and through the ranks of the soldiers, scattered them, ground them under, smashed them, and sent the remnants flying back toward the fortress gate.

The Grelvi raced through and between the sea-creatures now, leaving them behind. They ran faster than the soldiers easily, without even stretching themselves, golden shadows in the blue night. They, caught up with the soldiers and used the stunning beams on them, heaping them in windows before the gate.

"Through the gate!" cried Zeehn, and fifty, sixty, a hundred golden giants poured into the fortress, taking Kerrick with them.

There were still soldiers in the fortress. Lances and slung stones came at them out of shadowed doorways and colonnades that were only long lines of slotted blackness under the torches. Some of the Grelvi cried out and a few of them fell, but they did not stop.

Kerrick panted in their midst across courtyards of ancient stone slimy with moss and up a broad stairway, flashing their own weapons as they went—and they were using the third notch on them now. When the pale flickering beams hit a man he fell and did not move again.

There was a pocket of fierce resistance at the head of the great stair. Kerrick fought side by side with the Grelvi to break it, using the weapon they had given him but contenting himself with the stun-ray. A stone struck him an agonizing blow in the lower ribs and a lance just grazed him. Then the fortress soldiers defeated as much by their ancient fear of the Grelvi as by their superior weapons, broke and ran and there was no more fighting.

Zeehn and his party passed swiftly on into the Lawmaker's hall. But Kerrick went no farther than the door.

A number of the Sulvini had gathered in the hall, both men and women. They had obviously left their villas in great haste to take refuge in the fortress. They were standing in an unhappy crowd, the women inclined to be hysterical, the men too paunchy and bewildered to do much of anything.

Sitting on his high seat at the end of the hall was the Lawmaker.

Kerrick had never seen him before, but he had formed a mental picture of the man and that had not been far wrong. The Lawmaker was a large impressive man in a magnificent robe, and he wore his cap of office like the crown for which it was a substitute. He looked proud and defiant, ready to face the Grelvi. But underneath the impressiveness was soft fat, and underneath the pride was selfishness and greed, and underneath the defiance was fear.

Zeehn stepped forward. And there was a truly kingly figure, Kerrick thought, and looked urgently for Lella, and did not see her.

The Lawmaker spoke. "By what right do you break the peace and invade my land?"

Zeehn's great voice filled the hall. "By what right do you give my land to the Earthmen?" He moved forward again, and the Sulvini flinched away from him. "Have you forgotten the ivory tablets that set the boundary-rights of sea and land for all time? They have not crumbled away."

The Lawmaker said, "I will not discuss treaties with you while you remain in my city. Have your men return to the sea, taking their beasts with them and then we will see how matters stand."

Zeehn made a sound in his mas-

sive chest. It was not quite a laugh. "We have taken great trouble to come here. We shall stay until our business is done."

"You will go," said the Lawmaker, and now there was just the hint of hysteria in his voice. "You will have every one of your brutes out of the city within one hour, or Thane will die." He stood up. "Do you understand that? I have him where you won't find him if you take the fortress apart stone by stone, and in one hour he will die unless I personally take the word to spare him."

Kerrick glanced at his two guardians and nodded. They slipped aside from the doorway "Bring a couple more," he said, "and let's go."

"Where?" asked the Grelvi suspiciously.

"To find the women's quarters. The Lawmaker's daughter is our friend—Thane's friend. She'll know where he is."

HE SET OFF along the corridor, and the four tall Grelvi followed. They went through the halls like a whirlwind, opening doors, and on the third level they found one that was barred and the Grelvi broke it open.

Lella was there, just as beautiful as Kerrick remembered, a vivid living thing among women who

were like doughy lumps that wailed and screamed. She started a little at the sight of the Grelvi and then ran forward and gave Kerrick her hands.

"I watched the attack," she said. "I cheered you, until my father had me locked up in here. I'm glad you came back safe from Island 10, *litharni*."

Her face showed the signs of strain. He wanted to ask her a lot of personal questions, but instead he said,

"Your father threatens to kill Thane. Do you know where he has him?"

"He wouldn't," said Lella making a little shocked gesture. "Not really. It's only talk—"

"Perhaps," said Kerrick. "But if I were Thane I'd rather not take the chance. Where is he?"

"In the hidden cells. Donavel and Verilan are there too—" She snatched up a long silken cloak and said, "Come on."

Instead of going down as Kerrick had expected, she led them up a winding stair in one of the towers.

"It's a dreadful place just under the roof, with no room to stand upright except for the guard, and only tiny slits for light and air. Father put Thane and the others up here the minute you hit the beach." She handed Kerrick the

cloak. "Cover yourself with that, head and all. Have your weapon ready—you will have to be fast. And your friends must stay back out of sight. Now!"

Kerrick padded silently after her up the last wind of the stair. The Grelvi stayed behind.

The stair ended in a round bare room, quite low, with slitted windows, and no furniture except a stone bench where a man might sit and keep watch over the city. Any searcher would have given it one swift look and gone away again. But Lella climbed on the stone bench and rapped three times on a slab in the apparently solid ceiling.

Kerrick stood behind her, muffled in the cloak and sweating, the Grelvi weapon in his hand.

Lella called, "Open up—it's Lella, and I have a message from the Lawmaker."

The stone was lifted up, apparently on weights, and a man's face appeared in the opening.

"What is—" he said, and Kerrick hit him with the stun-ray.

A half-minute later the Grelvi were crouched in the ugly little hole overhead, tearing away by main strength the bars that held Thane on one side and Donavel and his son on the other in cages under the slant of the roof. The guard had no keys on him. But he

had a long stabbing spear which could only have one use in a place like that. Lella looked at it and her face became very white and grim. She took Donavel and his son aside and spoke to them while Thane and the Grelvi went through their own ritual of greeting.

Then Thane turned to Kerrick. "You've done a splendid job for everyone but yourself. There was a killing on Island 10, wasn't there, the night you left?"

"Yes. They were after me, and somebody pulled the switch on a test fractionator but another poor devil got it. How did you know?"

"The Lawmaker is a frightened man and frightened men boast. Welker has said you killed the man because he was trying to stop you from leaving the island. That's the report he sent to the Company."

"Trying to forestall me in case I did come back from the Grelvi with some charges against him." Kerrick's jaw tightened. "Well, I've got a report of my own to send the Company, and with you and Zeehn and Lella to back me up—"

"You'll have a hard time sending any report now," said Thane.

"Why? The communication center here in the city—"

"It was wrecked last night—by Welker's request. So now the only

radio is in the plant, and Welker is not such a fat indolent slob as these Sulvini. He was afraid of trouble and he's got the plant so well defended that with the kind of weapons we can muster—even the Grelvi—we don't have a chance in the world of breaking in."

CHAPTER VIII

IT WAS MORNING. The city was quiet now from the fortress to the sea. The battle here was over and the work of cleaning up had not yet begun. During the night the herd had floundered wearily back to sea.

There was still fighting going on. This time it was around the Jones & Lansing plant, and this time the vicious sounds of powerful modern guns punctuated the shouts of men and Grelvi. Donavel had left the fortress soon after his release to rouse his own party, and had talked them into a rather uneasy partnership with the tall golden men of the sea. Together they were making a noisy and threatening attack on the plant, but the guns that Welker had provided and the electrified fences were keeping them back.

"He must have been expecting trouble," Kerrick said grimly. "He's got the place set up like a fortress."

He was standing on the beach below the city, well out of sight of the plant. Thane was helping him on with his diving-gear.

"The Lawmaker knew he was facing a revolt," Thane said. "He was counting on Welker to help him put it down under pretext of protecting Company property. They had a very handsome deal planned out between them, if it had only worked."

It would not work for the Lawmaker, who had been deposed. But Welker would remain untouched and Island 10 would continue to be a source of trouble, and the charge of murder against Kerrick would stand unless he could manage to get through his own report in such a way that a thorough investigation would have to be made.

And there was only one way to do that.

Or maybe there wasn't even one way.

Kerrick was about to find out.

He nodded toward the sound of the fighting. "Keep them busy watching the fences," he said. "They'll be less likely to notice us."

The sea-mining operations, being fully automatic, would go on anyway, fighting or not. But the more preoccupied the plant personnel was with other things the better for Kerrick's lunatic plan.

Thane nodded. He said, "Good luck."

Kerrick set his mouthpiece and mask in place and plunged into the water where a score of the Grelvi were waiting.

They swam together, mostly under water, to a point opposite the plant and just on the edge of the area marked off with lines of red danger-buoys. Beyond the buoys the water became muddy and disturbed, flowing in the manner of a colossal riptide except that its direction was toward the shore instead of away from it. It ended in a vast ugly confusion of chopping wavelets and foam, and there, deep under the surface, were the massive double pipes of the intakes.

Part of Kerrick's job as a diver had been the occasional repair work necessary on the intakes. So he knew how they were set up. He had explained very carefully to the Grelvi how they worked normally in tandem and at half-load, how the great toothed rotors of the clearing mechanisms caught the weed that would otherwise have clogged the intakes and threw it off into lateral passages where other machinery passed it on as waste. He explained how sometimes something was sucked in that was too large and solid for the rotors to handle, and then

they jammed and automatic controls shut off all power to that tube, switching the full load to the other one.

And when that happened, a diver was sent down through one of a series of hatches depending on where the obstruction was, to clear it.

The Grelvi had listened with interest, while Kerrick explained these things and then described his plan. They were doubtful—not of the plan or of their ability to carry it out, but of his. And he had said,

"Well, if I come to grief, you can always turn around and go back."

So they were here, at the edge of the muddy race. The Grelvi paused to surface, keeping low in the water, breathing deep.

Then they dived.

Before dawn the carcass of one of the sea-elephants killed in the fighting had been towed out and sunk here, anchored with ropes and heavy stones to the bottom. Now the ropes were slashed and the Grelvi braced their mighty backs and thrust the heavily-buoyant hulk forward.

KERRICK FELT the edges of the current begin to tug at him. The carcass lumped along just clear of the bottom like a

hideous balloon. It began to move faster, rolling over and over, and the current pulled it in and gripped it and carried it away, and Kerrick was carried too, whirling in a blind smother of mud and weed. He fought against it but the current was greater than any force he had ever imagined. He lost sight of the carcass. He lost the Grelvi. The current rushed and raced and roared him on toward the all-devouring pipes and he was lost and he knew it. And then powerful hands caught him and powerful bodies joined and strained with his own against the current. He caught sight of the carcass again, ahead of him, lifted up by the force of the water and seeming to fly toward the gigantic round mouths open to receive it. It whirled heavily around, hesitating where the current split in two. Then it chose the right-hand stream and passed on into the pipe and out of sight.

Frantically Kerrick motioned to the Grelvi who were holding him. He saw others around him now, riding that dreadful stream. They swung all to the right, following the carcass. And as suddenly as the snapping of a man's fingers the terrible suck of the current stopped. The pumps on No. 2 Intake were stilled.

Moving fast before the swirl

and suck of the more powerful stream that was already beginning to move into No. 1 could catch them, Kerrick and the Grelvi swam into the huge tunnel of the tube.

And now Kerrick was in the lead and he had no time for faltering or mistakes. The Grelvi, even with their lung capacity, could not stay down forever.

He shot forward. The Grelvi lights lit the water for him showed the white plasticon curve of the tube, and then the first of the series of rotors, with the carcass of the sea-elephant jammed securely in it.

He passed the carcass, slipping between the great unmoving blades that gleamed coldly in the light. The Grelvi followed him, and one swam up beside him and made a gesture urging him to hurry.

He sped on, fairly flying between the blades with their sharp steel teeth. And then he saw the marking on the roof of the pipe and shot toward it. For the safety of the diver the hatch controls worked from either side. He laid hold of them and pulled, and a golden-furred hand reached up and helped him.

A minute or two later they were all standing together in the maintenance shed above, the Grelvi shaking themselves and blowing like whales, Kerrick shedding his

gear and inwardly thanking heaven for open air.

The yard of the plant was deserted. Kerrick imagined that the men were all at the fences, facing the very noisy attackers who were carrying on with enormous vigor. Once in a while a gun went off. Kerrick beckoned to the Grelvi and set off at a run toward the main building.

They met one man on the way, hurrying to or from the fight, but he was no trouble. He stopped in mid-stride, staring at the golden giants who had appeared suddenly around a corner, and completely forgetting that he had a gun in his hand. He opened his mouth to yell, and Kerrick hit him with a Grelvi stun-ray and went on.

Fight or not, there was bound to be somebody in the main building. The party split up into four groups, to enter by different doors, according to Kerrick's plan. With five of the Grelvi he made for the entrance nearest to the communications room.

It was a glassite door. He caught a shadow of movement from inside it just in time to shout a warning and fling himself to one side. In the same instant the door was flung open and someone fired through it, the bullets throwing dirt in Kerrick's face as he rolled. One of the Grelvi roared, with

such loud anger that Kerrick thought he could not be badly hit. Then the firing stopped.

Welker's voice rang out of the doorway. "Give yourself up, Kerrick, and I'll let your friends go. Otherwise—"

"Otherwise hell," yelled Kerrick. "The Lawmaker tried that kind of bargaining with Thane and it didn't work. We're coming in"

He was behind some ornamental bushes, part of the planting around the main building. They were inadequate cover. He did not at all want to kill Welker—he was going to need him for the investigation. On the other hand he did not want to get killed himself, and he did not want the Grelvi slaughtered either. Their weapons were too short-range to be effective against guns, and one of the groups that had gone in by other ways would be bound to come upon Welker from inside, any minute now.

HE NOTCHED his weapon carefully to the third position and called softly to the Grelvi to stay where they were. Then he pointed the weapon at a large flowering shrub perhaps ten feet from the door and just inside its range of effectiveness.

"Watch this, Welker," he shouted. "See what the Grelvi, the non-human animals you were so

scornful of, can do! This is how they kill the weed so that nothing can live in the sea or on it. This is how they isolated Island ro. This is how they will kill you and every man in the plant. You can't stand against them."

The flowering shrub blackened, withered, drooped, and died.

It took practically no time at all. And Welker watched. At least he did not fire for that moment. Kerrick tried to see into the hall but it was shadowy in there. The lights must have been put out and the sunless Venusian day made all interiors dim. Welker was pressed back against the wall, out of sight, but Kerrick was not looking for Welker anyway, he was looking for the other Grelvi parties.

In desperation he switched the invisible death-beam to another shrub.

"The sea belongs to them, Welker! They control it and you can't steal from them. See?"

The second shrub curled and darkened.

There was a rush of bodies, dim gold in the long dim hall.

Welker cried out.

Kerrick sprang to his feet and ran straight for the door, notching the weapon back to the second position as he went. A shot crashed but no bullet hit him and then he was in the doorway and

through it and Welker was standing with his back to him, facing the Grelvi who had come in the back, and one of the Grelvi was falling forward with a slow majesty, a spot of red widening on the bright fur just over his heart.

Kerrick pressed the firing-stud.

Welker gasped as the stun-ray hit him, and then he fell too, but without majesty. Kerrick leaned over him and took the gun out of his hand, and he thought that even in unconsciousness Welker's face reflected the beginning of a tragic realization.

"Tie him carefully," he said to the Grelvi, "and keep him safe."

They did, passing by their dead comrade calmly because this was not the time for mourning.

"And now," said Kerrick, "I don't think there's anything more to stop us from sending that message."

HE SENT IT, while the Grelvi stood guard over the communication room and frightened the young operator into unquestioning obedience. Then he sent word over the Company intercom system to stop the fighting, and the thoroughly bewildered men were ready to obey. In the next hour a truce was patched up, Welker was taken to the fortress and lodged in a safe place, and a ship

was sent out to bring the men back from Island ro.

Toward evening Kerrick sat in the great hall of the fortress, talking to Lella and Thane and Donavel. The high seat was empty. The Lawmaker was temporarily a prisoner in his own apartments and would stay so until he had answered the questions of the interplanetary board of inquiry that was already on its way.

"No harm will come to him," Donavel had promised Lella, "but only for your sake. He was an evil ruler."

"And an evil father, too," said Lella. "Nevertheless he is my father, and so I must protect him. Who will they choose in his place?"

Thane grinned. "Who but Donavel? So we see the beginning of another cycle. The hardy herds-men and fisherfolk replace the Sulvini and become Sulvini themselves."

Donavel shook his head. "Never."

"Ask your grandchildren," said Thane. "You can't fight it. It's the way of the world."

"Oh, stop," said Lella. "Let him enjoy his triumph." She put her hand on Kerrick's arm. "And what of you?"

"I'll be all right," he said, feeling good, feeling happy with her hand touching him. "Some of the Grelvi went along to Island ro. They'll find the man Welker sent out there—the man who actually did the killing—they have a talent for things like that. And with the full testimony before the board, backed up by the ivory tablets of the Grelvi, I don't think any of us have to worry about a thing."

"I think," said Lella softly, "that for the first time since I stopped being a child, I'm really happy."

She didn't take her hand away.

Distant and deep, a sound of chanting came through the seaward windows.

"Listen," said Thane. "The Grelvi are going now."

They went and looked out over the roofs of the city to the beach. The Grelvi were gathered there alone in the blue evening, with the wreaths of mist already blowing in gently from the water. On their shoulders they bore nine of their number who would fight no more. Chanting they walked out into the sea, and then swam, out and out, the golden sea-men of the morning-star world, going home.

THE END

FOR YOUR BARGAIN SUBSCRIPTION — SEE PAGE 129

Wings Over The Worldcon

By

Forrest J. Ackerman

**Here's your complete report on the 16th
World Science Fiction Convention held in London,
plus latest news on upcoming Convention for '58**

THE FANTAPLANE, twenty-one hours after leaving New York, circled the clear British skies above North London airport. Inside *The Flying Dutchman* excitement was at a peak as 55 euphoric Americans prepared to disembark from their historic flight and be feted by their hosts, the Anglofans.

(Brief moments before the famous landing, the first airborne s.f. conclave—the Klemcon—was held in the sky. Inspiration of Stephen Schultheis, this conlet of sixty seconds duration in its short existence established, if nothing else, a record “high,” topping the Mylhicon (or Denvention) of 1941 located in mile-high Denver. Of course I would not put it past Bob Bloch to dispute this statement and contend that the Alcoholicon, at which George O'Smith was Guest of Honor, was the con at which

everyone got highest. But the Klemcon was a notably sober affair at which no one was caught with his pints down, for, as Weaver Wright observed when accepting the Dramamine Award for 1957, “Two pints invariably make one cavort.” The Klemcon (for KLM) was not in honor of Katherine L. Moore but the Kyle-Landis Marriage, of which we shall hear more presently. In the meantime; this is to scotch the rumor that the purpose of the hasty conference was to have *some* sort of a meeting in the event the British saw us coming and greeted us with a bang-bang of ack-ack. But there was no sinister barrage.)

Now the great silver avian from Gotham was about to volplane to earth, to set down on English soil the 55 “stateside” scifans and pro's who had for the first time in more-than-human history charter-

ed their own plane to transport them 3000 aerial miles to the Old World where the 15th World Science Fiction Convention would take place.

Flight of fantasy!

A sky lark in space.

The Kylmination of David's Dream.

It was Dave Kyle, chairman of 1956's Worldcon in New York, who had sacrificed himself to make this vision a reality. They laughed when he knelt down to pray; he heard the skeptics say, "If God had meant fans to fly, he would have provided them with holes in their heels instead of their heads so they could use their hot air to jet with"; but now Kyle's moment of truth had come.

The first man who will set foot on the Moon has already been born. Willy Ley and Arthur Clarke have told us so. We do not yet know his name, but everybody aboard the Fantaplane knew the name of the man who deserved to be the first out the hatch and down the gangplank. It was only a question of whether Kyle would have the energy left to carry his bride across the threshold.

Dave Kyle—fan, author, organizer—participated in the First worldcon in 1939, has attended, and contributed in some measure, to nearly every one since.

Ruth Landis, one of the cutest

and sweetest fannes the world has ever seen, met her husband-to-be at the Clevention in 1955. Two years to the day she met him, Ruth became Mrs. David Ackerman Kyle at an impressive wedding attended by Groff Conklin, Frederik Pohl, Mr. and Mrs. Leo Margulies, Richard Wilson, Leslie Perri, Martin Greenberg, Hans Stefan Santeson, other s.f. personalities, and Yours Sciencereally.

This was the nuptial flight—a honeymoon shared with over half a hundred sci-fi fen and professional pen-men—and it was only natural and right that the hubby-mooning Ruth and her gallant groom should be the first to fling wide the aeroplane's portals and, Gods of the Sky, descend to be greeted by the native mortals who awaited them.

On the interior of the ship it became now only a matter of jockeying for 2d, 3d and 4th places. Robert A. Madle, as winner of the TransAtlantic Fan Fund, it was felt was entitled to follow Ruthandave (or Davenruth, whichever way you looked at this inseparable pair), but who should be next: Sam Moskowitz, Historian of Fandom? Forrest J. Ackerman, Mr. Science Fiction? George Nims Raybin, Legal Officer of the World Science Fiction Society? or Franklin Dietz, Official Tape Recorder of the Cons?

Nervously MRS. Ruth KYLE moistened her lips and sotto voce kept repeating "cheese." Bob Madle consulted his cuff. Sam Moskowitz was unperturbed. For the nth time Fja mentally reviewed his extemporaneous speech (he had decided to let Moskowitz precede him so Sam would be sure and hear it and record it for posterity in THE IMMORTAL STORM BLOWS AGAIN): "This is the realization of HG Wells' prediction of Wings Over the World; we are, to paraphrase Leslie F. Stone, Fen With Wings. As a boy of nine I never dreamed that 30 years later—"

And then the door was flung wide and a kaleidoscope of sights and sounds hurricaned inside. Confetti whirled like technicolored snowflakes and there was a montage of shouting, a roaring well of WELCOME HURRAY! HEY, SAM! LOOK THIS WAY! etc. as flash-bulbs popped and hands were shaken and microphones were thrust into faces and reporters' ballpoints went into action and Ted Carnell's camera whirled away (Carnell kept wanting the passengers to go up the plank again and descend so he'd be sure to record the historic occasion) and—

"CUT!!!"

"Now what's the matter?"

"No, no, no, that's not the way it was at all," a silver-haired

cantankerous old man cried out.

"Technical Advisors!" the movie director swore under his breath as this particular pest, someone named Forrest J. Ackerman who had been hired to insure accuracy in 21st Century-Fox's filmization of Sam Moskowitz, Jr.'s THE ETERNAL CYCLONE, sped over the set in his jet-propelled wheelchair. Ackerman, with his insistence on historical truth, was lousing up the whole script, minimizing melodrama to the point of invisibility. First he had insisted that the plane had carried only 55 passengers, not 500; next he wouldn't permit a little literary liberty like a propellor falling off over Newfoundland; he wouldn't sanction an encounter with a flying saucer over Shannon, an emergency operation on Boyd Raeburn for Twonk's Disease (performed by guttering candlelight by Robert Abernathy) or a striptease by Valkon Anjoorian to liven up the wee small hours aboard the plane; and in particular he was pesky about vetoing Della Mondela to play the role of Ruth Kyle. So what if Della with her 6'5" of pneumatism topped by a flaming crop of red hair wasn't exactly Ruth's petite, demure type?—she was *esaro-boxo* (motion picture terminology of the year 2000 indicating the star in question would line the customers up at the bucks-

office and guarantee to stand 'em in the aisles at every show).

CUTTING THE KIDDING and getting down to cases, our actual reception at touchdown *was* a dismal disappointment for there was no one there to greet us with brass band or even clasp of hand. They couldn't help it that we were a couple of hours ahead of schedule, and so the magnificent moment limped into limbo as we desultorily dispersed to Passports and Customs. 'Twas not till dinnertime that the Welcoming Committee finally caught up with us, and afterwards we were bussed into London proper and our Convention Hotel.

During the bus ride most of us shied as a stream of traffic kept coming toward us on what seemingly was the wrong side of the road, and again it is one thing (in America) to be acquainted with the occasional small European sportscar on the street but another to be three-dimensionally surrounded by swarms of such minimobiles. "And to think that here *we* are regarded as aliens!" Lee Sirat shook her head. At which Mary Dziechowski fannishly observed, "Where *aren't* we aliens?"

The King's Court Hotel, which was to be our rendezvous point for the next week, proved to be somewhat of a catastrophe: it was in

the process of being renovated, and pandemonium reigned! Rugs were torn out from under one's feet or tacked after one as one ascended stairs; the superstitious got gray hairs from ducking under ladders; and the odor of Chanel T (for turpentine) was everywhere in the air.

The banquet hall was unfortunate: about a mile long and an inch wide. By its narrow, elongated construction, a number of speakers were forced to show their backs to one third of an audience. For the first time that I can recall, banquetees were assigned seats (by whom I know not) rather than being free to pick their own company, and I'm afraid the locations were not universally popular. Many of the Americans who had made the greatest effort and traveled the farthest distance were relegated to least desirable positions. And as for myself—! Now I love Dorothea Faulkner, in fact I think I am partly responsible for having introduced "Dotty the Demon Grandma" to fandom; but I'll be damned if I appreciate traveling 6000 miles to have lunch with someone I could in effect have lunch with any day in the week. The horrible part about making such public complaints is that I have the unhappy feeling I may be hurting the feelings of some well-intentioned individual who reason-

ed that the two Californians might like to sit side by side, but Rory Faulkner can not only sit next to me any old time at home but, if she wants to, on my lap. I can well imagine on the occasion of the banquet that Rory would infinitely have preferred the company of Walt Willis to Forry, or any of a dozen other "foreign" fans; while for myself, I would have far greater appreciated being seated next to virtually any non-American present. Future meal managers, please note!

En passant, I was almost the inadvertent cause of an International Incident with the Queen of England. Deliberately chosen to give the "natives" a little touch of California flair, I had elected to wear a "bolo" tie with my best shirt and suit. This was a personal production by Bjo Fanta-Crafts of Southern California, and featured a cluster of polished desert rocks at the usual cravat knot-point. This unusual tie was a hit elsewhere on the Continent and in New York, but at the penultimate moment before going in for lunch I was hustled aside and instructed in no uncertain terms to "get rid of that ridiculous doodad" as toasting Her Majesty was a solemn occasion and such a sartorial innovation would be considered egregious. Seems something called Teddy Boys—Britain's teddible equivalent of

our teenage delinquents—currently effected similar ties. I'll never really know why my innocent little bauble should have upset the Queen so, considering all the bobbly bubbles she's seen when Marilyn Monroe, Diana Dors, Jayne Mansfield and other mammary queens have bowed low to her; but I fetched a proper tie and the show went on.

It was my pleasure and privilege to toast Absent Friends, among whom I counted (on all our behalfs) those departed Greats, Wells and Stapledon, as well as familiar worldcon faces we were missing: Tucker, Bloch, Asimov, Boucher, et al.

Arthur C. Clarke, Guest of Honor of the 14th Con, introduced the 15th's, John W. Campbell, Jr. Clarke characterized Campbell as a man poles apart from Edgar Rice Burroughs, and differing from Hugo Gernsback as a scientist does from a technologist. (Later Campbell was awarded a "Hugo" for top-excellence of his science fiction magazine.)

Campbell, in his luncheon speech, compared his office to a clearing house of ideas, himself to a catalyst. Earlier, to the press, he had explained that "there are no journals of speculation, of speculative thinking, of disciplined imagination, and the science fiction magazines come closest to that."

Bob Madle turned back the clock to describe the very first sf convention of any sort, a "convention" consisting of Donald A. Wollheim and 15 other youngsters. Historically and statistically minded Sam Moskowitz followed a little later in the program, pointing out to the interest of all that no less than 8 persons who attended the First World Science Fiction Convention nearly 20 years ago were assembled at this moment in London: John Campbell, F. J. Ackerman, Bob Madle, Sam (himself) Moskowitz, David Kyle, Harry Harrison, Oswald Train and John Victor Peterson.

ACROSS 2 DECADES, my memory of the first Worldcon is of about 135 persons attending altogether. Two hundred and sixty-eight signed in at the 15th, with an additional 288 having paid in memberships. Authors in attendance included John Wyndham, whose novels "Day of the Trifids" and "Out of the Deepes" have been optioned for scientifilming, and whose latest s.f. book, "The Midwich Cuckoos", MGM is preparing to produce; Robert Abernathy, whose stories have been appearing since 1941; Wm F. Temple, of "4-Sided Triangle" fame; hydra-headed, multi-pseudonymed Robert Silverberg MPA-56 (Most

Promising Author of 1956); Brian W. (name to watch) Aldiss; E. C. (arrived in Ace) Tubb; Eric Frank ("Call Him Dead"?—no, call him very much alive!) Russell; H. J. Campbell, Ken Bulmer, John Brunner, James White, John ("No Blade of Grass" bought for \$105,000 by MGM!) Christopher, and other international favorites.

Perhaps by 1975, when the world is rounded in 80 minutes by rockets and we fans are (wishful thinking) richer, we'll see a world-wide attendance of 500 to 1000 at a Can-Con in Paris or a Denmarcon (the Copenvention?)

A hi-lite of the Londoncon, by my lights, was The Ceremony of St Fantony. This was pomp and pageantry of a high order, done up in fine British fettle, and it was only because of the cramped quarters available for the performance that it has to be termed anything less than DeMillean, let us say a "shrinking fan's" Cecil B. DeMille production. A small-scale triumph of a large-scale enterprise, the Ceremony extrapolated knighthood and heraldry into the Space Age, and the rich and lavish costumes were a sight to behold and the solemnly proclaimed encrollments a sound to be heard. All hail the Cheltenham Science Fiction Circle and Knight Grand Master Eric Jones and Knight Armourer Robert

Richardson. Conventioneers involved in the ritual and invested with the Order included Walter Willis, Bob Madle, Ken Slater, Frank Dietz, Ellis Mills, Bobbie Wild, Terry Jeeves, Rory Faulkner, Eric Bentcliffe, Boyd Raeburn and Bob Silverberg.

Another highpoint of the Convention (all agreed) was the personal triumph of a New Personality. A 16 year old superboy from *Germany* scored a great individual success. His name—and one to conjure with in the future of World Fandom—Rainer Eisfeld. Only 16. I couldn't get over it. I thought of myself at 22, six years older than he and in my native land, going to my first convention, a trembling mass of scared green jello, afraid of the sound of my own voice, almost inarticulate and terrified that I would be so much as called upon to stand and be recognized . . . And here was young Rainer, a mere teenager, his first time in this (to him) foreign land of England, speaking a language not his own, and delivering a personally written and translated speech so well from memory that very few persons present, I'm sure, suspected it was other than extemporaneous, so great was Eisfeld's command of the language and of himself. The Dynamo of Deutschland, I have just thot of

dubbing him. I want to see this boy a candidate for the Trans-Atlantic Fan Fund, and in January of 1959 some lucky American family can have the pleasure of Rainer's company for a year when he comes to the USA on an exchange student scholarship basis. All he'll need (that he won't be able to pay for in cash) will be minimum room and board, in return for which I'm sure you'll get a very grateful household helper. Maybe you'd like someone to teach you (or your kids) German? There are many interesting possibilities. Anyone interested in corresponding with Rainer Eisfeld with a view to inviting him to be a working house guest a year from now, may contact him at Effertzstrasse 56, (22c) Bonn, Germany. I never regretted taking Japanfan No. 1, Tetsu Yano, into my home for five months; I envy whoever gets Rainer Eisfeld!

THE BBC had a telefield-day with the BEMs and other otherworldly characters present at the Masquerade Ball. So many costumed fans were crowded into one sardine-sized cubicle that hardly an extra terrestrial could be squeezed in, but the telecasters with their equipment pushed in where angels would have feared to trod but every other kind of crit-

ter from devils to Denebians did. Frank & Frau Dietz won a prize in the Fancy Dress Parade as did John Brunner & Marjorie Keller (as deCampian Krishnans), Norman Weedall, and extensively tele-filmed Mr. and Mrs. Kyle as the honeymooning space couple from the Planet Xstacy.

Sam Moskowitz, Bob Madle and myself, who for years at Cons have been playing the private game of Stomp the Experts (trying to stomp each other out of existence with brain-burning questions) volunteered to come out in the open and try to short-circuit each other's cerebrums. Publicly posed were such killer questions as "What was the middle name of Epaminondas T. Snooks?" (and, "Alright, but how do you spell Thucydides?"); "Name every story Stanley Grauman Weinbaum ever had published in the sci-fi field"; "Name the first 10 sf mags in the chronological order of their issuance"; "Name *all the* FRANKENSTEIN films!"; and similar kindergarten-ishly simply queries. Each of us stubbed our toes (or tentacles) once.

Mad Productions showed us a couple of funny homemade fan and fantasy pictures, and the feature film of the Con was the Special Award Winner of the Venice Film Festival, *Mr. Wonderbird*.

A "Hugo" was awarded *Science Fiction Times* as Best Fanzine of the Year, and to the Tolkien trilogy **LORD OF THE RINGS** went the coveted International Fantasy Award.

Based on his major opus in **THE SCIENCE FICTION YEAR-BOOK** for 1956, Sam Moskowitz gave an illuminating three-quarter of an hour discussion of his epochal and valuable Science Fiction Market Survey. Many eyebrow-raising statistics were analyzed.

John Campbell summarized the subject of Psionics and conducted a lively question and answer period.

The following week in Germany the first big 3-day Germanicon (officially the **BIGGERCON**) was held. Five of us Amerifans managed to make it. I was invited to be Guest of Honor, and I would like my 150 hosts to know that the reception I received impressed me like a hero's welcome. Surely my cup of egobrew was filled to overflowing with the constant requests for autographs, posed pictures with people, gifts, services, and the responses to my speeches (as attempted by myself in broken German or expertly translated by Rainer Eisfeld). I did not know what was going on when I made my (truly) extemporaneous farewell speech and in addition to ap-

plauding they all stamped their feet; it was later explained to me this was their equivalent of the standing applause, the ultimate accolade, and for this expression of appreciation I shall always be grateful. Ernsting, Scheer, Fries, von Puttkamer, Scudla, Spiegl, Rohr, usw—*danke!*

At the German Convention they showed WAR OF THE WORLDS, THE CONQUEST OF SPACE and THE QUATERMASS EXPERIMENT. There was an especially interesting, imaginatively conceived and artistically arranged, sci-fi exhibit of artwork, book jackets, magazine covers, scientific film stills, and 3-dimensional objects such as a magnificent mantall cutaway rocketship model, tabletop work of an alien landscape, etc. The Berlin group (27 strong in a chartered bus) brought a club-built robot, created from funds contributed a pfennig (about two and a half cents) at a time. The modern Eurofan does not have much money, but he has a lot of fun; and the Gernsback of today has such prozines to elect from as *Utopia*, *Uranus*, *Terra* and *Luna*. Their correspondence club, the Science Fiction Club Deutschland, is approaching a thousand strong.

Rainer Eisfeld gave a detailed report on the Worldcon. Jesco von

Puttkamer (a real Baron), who is looked to as the literary writer most likely to bring German sci-fi to the attention of translation markets, gave a talk which evoked much laughter. Wolf Detlef Rohr and K. H. Scheer received awards for their outstanding space operas, and "Clark Darlton" (Walter Ernsting) was sent two Hugo-plaques by Hugo Gernsback himself in recognition of Ernsting's capture two years in a row of the Best German S.F. Novel popularity poll. Hans Fries, a John Drew Barrymore with beard, masterminded the loudest and funniest s.f. auction I have ever witnessed in any language.

The Gernsbacks took me utterly and completely by surprise when they presented me with the most exquisite alarm clock I have ever seen, a silver and gold replica of the globe that splits in half to reveal a gorgeous timepiece. A thing of beauty and a joy forever, that right now is ringing to remind me that two hours hence I have to depart for a fanquet to tell the local aficionados substantially the same story that I have just told you. Except that the real life story has a happy ending, whereas in the written version on the way back the Fantaplane flew into the 4th Dimension, never to be seen again, and this account was

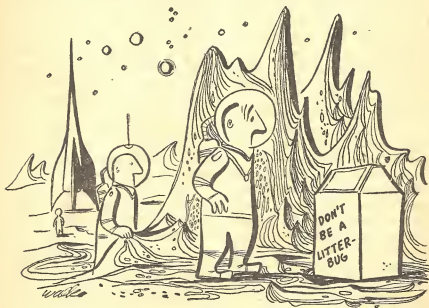
ghost written.

Here I go, ready or not, to the 23rd Anniversary meeting of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society, meeting number about 1050. Incidentally, South Gate (suburb of Los Angeles) got the bid for the 16th World Science Fiction Convention. LA put on the Pacificon (4th Worldcon) in 1946, first worldcon to add a day to the previous 3-day schedules. 1958's big event will officially be nicknamed the Solacon, rhyming with the Nolacon of 1951. The latter was derived from New Orleans, La.,

while the Solacon recognizes the collaboration between South Gate and Los Angeles. The Convention will actually be held in LA over Labor Day, and memberships may now be obtained thru the mail at \$1 apiece from Rick Sneary, Solacon Treasure, 2962 Santa Ana St, South Gate, Calif. Whether or not you're sure you can attend, it's worthwhile to become a member at the earliest opportunity.

Worldcons forever! Worldcons are more fun than a barrel of money.

THE END



WANTED: A Planet To Boss

by

Tom W. Harris

What was the most cooperative and docile alien life form? McNary knew the only possible answer — Trolls; they could please you to death!

CAPTAIN - EXPLORER McNary looked out across the salt-flats of Provo and set his jaw. He was going out there soon, with only a few of the unreliable trolls with him because his three-man crew were still making the ship ready to leave Provo. The flats stretched gray-white, silent, in some places dry and in some mucky, black-slotted with the yawning, abandoned, ancient irrigation canals that must have once meant fertility to the planet and then had brought decline by the salts they carried and built up slowly in the soil.

Here and there the gray surface stirred slightly with a buried menace. Handworms. There's always some new monster, thought McNary. Yes, and there's always the old-fashioned kind, like French.

"Provo wasn't worth the finding," French had pronounced pompously the night before. "I

realize you'd like to make it seem as important as possible—only human—but those are the facts." And he had tilted back in his campstool and dragged on one of the cigars he had carried all the way from Earth. French had a double chin and a paunch and a certain amount of power, all of them accumulated through inertia-filled years as an obscure inspector for the Galactic Resources Commission. He was especially fond of the Power.

French's ship had touched down on Provo only a few hours ago. McNary had been surveying the place for days.

"But you've seen my reports! Almost pure radium in those hills over there! And the leaves of the eye-winker plant are full of natural namarin—our most valuable drug and the hardest to synthesize!"

"Too far from earth," grunted



French. "And for radium you'd have to move heavy equipment out here—or a good many men. Can't. Priorities."

"Maybe the trolls could do it."

"Them?" French pointed with a contemptuous laugh.

Eight or nine of the creatures had drawn near to where the men were seated. About two feet high, they looked like descendants of rabbits and mutant gnomes, with a fairybook look that had led McNary to pick the name "troll"

for them. Their faces were seamed with mobile wrinkles and loose-hung skin. At each side of the gothic-domed bald heads were floppy, wrinkled organs combining the functions of nose and ears.

"Sammy, come here a second," asked McNary. The one called Sammy pittered up in little hops. "Do you think you and your friends could mine radium?"

The trolls had voices like flutes. They had learned English, but they spoke it like talking clarinets.

"I don't know, friend," piped Sammy. "We trolls are not good for much?"

"You can handle radium without injury—is that correct?"

"Assuredly. But a project—organized and all—it would be so complicated."

French spoke flatly "They're stupid."

The comment made in the troll's presence angered McNary. "Maybe," he said, "but they sure learned English in a hurry."

French snorted. "Probably imitative reflex and no intelligence involved at all. You've seen cases before."

McNary reddened under the truth of it. Nevertheless, he knew a worthwhile planet when he saw one. French had not really judged the evidence about Provo. McNary had made some mistakes with French.

When French had arrived he had expected truckling and flattery, and McNary had not bothered to give it to him. McNary was not one for ceremony and civility and what he considered flapdoodle. He had greeted French courteously and given his report—again making a mistake in that he had volunteered the facts without waiting for the inspector to condescend to ask questions. And now the old sow would vent his peeve by mak-

ing Provo appear to be of no importance. McNary didn't give a real damn about building a reputation earthside—he had been space-hopping too long. But Earth could be deprived of a really valuable contact because of a petty grudge, and McNary didn't intend to let that happen.

"Every race has advantages," he said to French. "Even the trolls."

French sighed. "Are you even sure about the amount of radium here? Might be local concentrations. And you don't even have any samples."

"I'll tell you what," said McNary, holding his voice steady, "Tomorrow I'll get samples. And I'll make a broader survey—fast. I believe the standard procedure is to allow the explorer enough time for this. And tomorrow when you leave, my ship will leave along with you. I'll volunteer my services to help you present our evidence earthside."

French glared, but there was nothing he could do about it.

EIGHT HOURS LATER, at the noon of the Provian day, McNary started across the plain, a few trolls with him. And halfway to the hills, a hand-worm struck him. It flopped up suddenly almost beneath his feet as

though it had been a land mine waiting for his footfall.

Several feet long, five tentacles wormed around him and he couldn't unsheath his blaster. The thing was intelligent enough, apparently, to wrap a fingering tentacle around his holster. The wrist-like stalk was pushing up slowly from the muck, raising the belly-muscle, like the palm of a hand to which the five tentacles were attached like fingers.

The trolls had scampered in terror, the wrinkles writhing excitedly across their faces, and McNary could hear them in the distance twittering in their birdlike language.

He was not yet frightened. He was not, like some captain-explorers, incapable of fear. But he had seen a good many dangers by now, and it took a good bit to really frighten him. His first reaction to danger was a certain fist-like tightening of his mind; he centered on alertness, action, and appraisal of possibilities.

Suddenly he yelled as he could. It was not an hysterical but a logical action. But there were no answering shouts from his men or French.

He could no longer hear the useless twittering of the trolls.

The hand-worm had raised its flat belly-muscle and was trying

to push it against him. Simultaneously the tentacles were trying to hug him to it. Don't let the mere sight of the thing panic you, he thought.

The belly was puffy, slitted with little razor-lipped mouths and dewed with pearly digestive ooze.

He set his boot against it and shoved, bracing his knee against his chest. That should keep his body from it while he worked his knife from his shoulder sheath so he could slice off the tentacles.

The scattered eyes of the handworm watched him, sunk like blueberries in the mauve of the belly. As his right hand approached his knife a tentacle whipped around his wrist. Yes, the handworm had intelligence.

He would have to use his left hand, and twist his body so the purple eyes did not observe it. He tried to twist, and failed. His knee was jammed too tightly against his chest. The pressure was enormous, and he felt the teathed lips working against his bootsole and saw the shreds of olefin falling.

The creature would chew and chew the end of his leg. First his foot, then his ankle, his calf, his thigh, and finally his whole torso would be jammed against the little mouths.

He began to yell again, and there now was fear in his voice.

He called to his men, and to French, and to French's men, and nobody came.

In desperation he began to call to the trolls, his voice imperative, and miraculously he heard the shiftless creatures coming.

He turned his head and saw there was a throng of nearly a hundred—and that of course they had no weapons. Yet if they had bravery—and if they would do as he told them—they could help him.

"Grab the tentacles!" he shouted. "Get the tentacles off me!"

The trolls stopped twittering and stood dumbly.

The pressure on McNary's chest was increasing; he had trouble producing words.

"Right now!" he commanded. "Twenty of you to a tentacle! Pull them off me!"

HIS VOICE WAS TIGHT and urgent, and suddenly something seemed to happen among them. They came bouncing and rolling and, exactly twenty to a tentacle, opened battle with the handworm. As the worm-fingers were pulled away, McNary slid weakly to the ground, rolling out of reach. They sliced the handworm with his knife and there was a sickening smell.

In a few moments McNary had

some wind back and sat up.

The trolls were milling aimlessly, and a thought came to McNary. "Pick me up, some of you. Carry me back to camp."

They obeyed him, this time instantly.

French paraded an I-told-you-so attitude but McNary didn't care. He had an idea about the trolls. For some reason they lacked initiative, imagination, some vital impulse. But perhaps they were natural followers of orders.

He tested his theory by sending them for radium, adding orders for a fast mineral survey. They responded intelligently and swiftly.

French was not pleased, especially when blastoff time approached and McNary was approached by a group of trolls asking for more orders. . . any kind of orders.

McNary had them clean the camp, help load the ship, fetch his boots, and the crowd grew larger and larger. Finally he set them to digging holes and filling them in.

The trolls were wildly enthusiastic.

"They discovered something at the same time I did," McNary told French. "There's something in their makeup that makes them crave to be bossed around. Maybe there was someone else here once—some race of rulers, who left,

and the planet declined—or maybe the trolls have just evolved away from initiative.”

“Interesting—but so what?” said French. “I believe it’s time we were leaving?”

But McNary was impeded on his way to his ship. The trolls were chittering and clustering around him like agitated penguins. “Please don’t leave us” The tootling voice belonged to Sammy. “We want somebody to tell us what to do!”

McNary hesitated. “I’ll take four of you with me—you and you and Sammy. For the rest of you, these are my orders. Dig radium every day until an earth ship returns. Pile it by the hills. And now goodbye.”

French stepped forward, his face suspicious. “I just happened to think, captain. The air conditioning on my ship is rather uncomfortable. Mind if I travel with you?”

McNary considered. “Not if you don’t mind being crowded. The forward specimen rooms happen to be empty; I guess we can accommodate you.” Mentally he added “you suspicious old goat.”

THEY WERE four months out; they had four more to go; McNary worried. The trolls had reproduced; there were now

twenty-seven of them, and they had turned the craft into a unique hell which only French enjoyed. They kept doing things for people.

The crew was spoiled rotten. Fanting, naturally a bit foppish, no longer even dressed himself. He had five valets do it. Nobody, even McNary, fed themselves. Trolls stood by each and served the food into their mouths, and McNary had to admonish Sammy about attempting to go a step further and prechew the food.

If a man had been in his bunk and left it for a moment, he came back to find it made. If a shoelace came untied a troll appeared, hopping alongside the wearer, with flying fingers.

McNary had thought the little creatures might be useful, and also that they would prove interesting on earth. Now he was worried. He had good men, but he shuddered to think what might happen in an emergency.

Furthermore, there was boredom and quarrels. Pickens and Train had fought over Pickens having one extra troll at his disposal. The quarrel was stilled when a female was asked to reproduce. They were astoundingly fertile. Infants had a two-day gestation and matured a week after birth.

The complete sexual cooperativeness of the female posed yet an-

other problem, in spite of the unorthodoxy of their charms.

Only French enjoyed it. He had the trolls jumping most of the time. They delighted him. He had worn out a uniform by having one troll soil it and another clean it. He set the trolls to transferring drinking water among a set of flasks. If the ship happened to be de-gravitated, spilled drops meandered off through the air and the trolls spent hours capturing them.

And then the captain learned that French was using a troll to stand his watch. Nobody traveled first class on McNary's ship—you shared duties. French had griped, now he was shirking.

McNary called him into his tiny cabin.

"Mr. French, the trolls are very useful. But I can't allow them to take over important duties of the ship."

Sammy stuck his wrinkled face into the room. "You haven't given me any orders for nearly five minutes, Captain."

"Just wait. Please, just a . . . hmmm. I order you to just stand there for ten minutes."

Sammy got comfortable and began his job of just standing.

"Well," said French, "I can't see that it's so important. Anyway, my trolls are most reliable."

"I doubt that you can properly

refer to them as 'your trolls,' said McNary.

"Pardon me," fluted Sammy. "Any special way you'd like me to stand, sir?"

"Ye gods!" McNary burst. "Stand with your feet close together and your ears standing up."

"Yes sir." Sammy's lettuce-leaf ears lifted.

"I must ask you to take the troll off your watch," said McNary to French. "The watch, incidentally, may properly be called 'yours.'"

French raised his eyebrows and stuck out his jaw.

"Immediately," added McNary.

Two more trolls appeared. "Any orders, sir? Please?"

McNary exploded. "Get as far aft as you can, and stand there, and take the others with you."

They hopped off happily.

"I'm a little annoyed at being treated like an ordinary crewman," said French slowly. "My trolls happen to be completely loyal to me, and I believe I'll just go on letting Bertram stand my watch."

McNary felt a hard cold anger. This fool could endanger the whole ship. He stepped briskly from his compartment and snapped an order across the control room. "Bertram—or whatever your name is! You will leave your post immediately and go aft!"

As the troll stepped down, French's voice clubbed out, heavy with command. "Back to your post! I order it!"

The troll continued aft without even slowing down, leaving French scowling and McNary looking thoughtful. McNary had just stumbled into something.

There was less trouble after that, but McNary was glad when the trip was over. They had a hundred and eleven trolls aboard when they touched down at Yorkport. McNary guessed it must be something in the earth-type atmosphere. Trolls on Provo had no such reproductive rate.

THERE WAS DELAY—three weeks of it—in getting to see the Earth Director. By that time Yorkport had nearly nine hundred trolls, and they continued reproducing. Trolls were working in factories, in construction gangs, and were being tried as writers of commercials. They always followed orders, worked incessantly twenty hours a day, and asked no wages. French and McNary were being hailed as benefactors of humanity. McNary let French hog most of the publicity. He had a feeling trouble might be coming. When it did, he would make the best use of the ideas—or discoveries—that had come to him aboard ship.

The interview with the director was rather unsatisfactory. The Director was a wizened, pale, small man—they had changed directors since McNary's last visit to earth twenty years ago. The interview was informal, almost casual. They sat on a terrace of the Great House, drinking southtea served by two of the eleven trolls on the Great House staff.

"I have read all your reports," said the Director. "Suppose we just chat. These trolls seem to be extremely useful. I understand, Mr. French, that you were instrumental in discovering their talents?"

French beamed. "Perhaps. But we must give the real credit to Captain McNary here."

"You are modest," said the Director.

A troll appeared. "Do you have any orders, sir?"

"No thank you," said the Director. "You'd think," he told his guests, "that they'd leave the Earth Director of the United Systems alone. But they pester me just as much as anyone. Two days ago, one attempted to read a speech for me. A troll by the name of Bertram."

"Ah yes," said McNary as French reddened. "Bertram—one of the original immigrants. We found him most useful on the ship."

The troll appeared from behind

the director's chair.

"Are you sure you don't have any orders?"

"Count the grass in the lawn," snapped the Director. The troll left.

"My orderly is supposed to keep them supplied with orders," said the Director. "Sometimes they get by him. There is only one order they never obey—and that is not to ask for orders."

"They're stupid," said French. "Just as I told the Captain-explorer, back on Provo."

The rest of the interview was the same; casual talk, a little skirmishing by French. The next day McNary yielded to a desire which had been with him for almost five years, whenever he had made plans for the time he would visit Earth again. He packed a few clothes, hopped into his helio, and went fishing. He carried no radio nor radar nor television. He fished for big fish in the Gulf of Mexico, in the friendly sea of his native planet, and loafed in the same sun and swam in the same water that humans had luxuriated in since the day when men thought stars were spirit-eyes and the idea of men traveling to them and beyond them would not have been not laughable but inconceivable.

He was gone almost two weeks, and the lonely goodness of the earth-seas restored him in a way

no alien vacationing ever could. He flew back to Yorkport by night, tired but fulfilled: He left the helio hovering outside his hotelroom balcony, whispered his numerals into the identifier on the french windows, and stepped inside. He stepped into the valet closet and got a shower and shave. Then he went to bed.

In the morning he was awakened by the crash of glass.

He leaped from bed as there was another crash and a bottle sailed through his window. His room was on the second floor, and he could hear the sounds of a crowd of people. He threw on his uniform and stepped toward the window.

"What's going on out there?"

A YELL WENT UP as the crowd saw him. A short, plump man stood up on a motor scooter. McNary noticed that French stood near him.

"I speak for the people of Yorkport," bawled the man. "The trolls must go!"

"Why pick on me?"

"You brought 'em here!"

"Yea!" yelled the mob.

A huge man stood up with a troll in his arms. "Here—you take it," he shouted. "Take all of 'em." The troll came sailing through the window, its bald head crashing

against the opposite wall.

A woman shook her fist. "The trolls are driving us out of the city. The streets are filled with beggars—trolls—they don't beg money, they pester you for orders. We can't stand it!"

Suddenly McNary wondered how the mob had known he was here. The sight of Bertram—evidently discharged from his Great House job—gave him a clue. Bertram was hanging around French, like somebody who has been on a spying mission.

Suddenly the big man picked up Bertram and threw him through the window. "Any orders, sir?" asked the battered trolls, rising dizzily from the floor.

"Take 'em back where they came from!" yelled the big man.

McNary stepped back into the room and punched the Great House on his visor. Nothing happened—somebody had scrambled the adapters. On an impulse he cut in the public broadcast visor, and it worked.

They had the cameras on the mob in front of his hotel. An announcer was talking.

". . . slipped in during the night. Now the crowd has gathered outside his hotel room. State police have tried to get through, but beyond the crowd the streets are full of panicking trolls. Schwarz's com-

mittee has filled the air with helios—police don't dare risk a collision. That's Schwarz standing by French. His Citizen's Committee on Alien Defense has petitioned the United Congress to get rid of all trolls immediately.

"There are nearly two million trolls in Yorkport by latest estimate. The trolls in factories have started a new kind of strike. Complaining that there is not enough work for them, they go on work strikes. They refuse to stop working. The strikes are not organized, for the Trolls have no troll for a leader."

A stone crashed through the window, followed by a dazed troll.

"Yesterday, Mr. French told your announcer this." The scene dissolved to show the announcer interviewing French. French spoke.

"I have advised the Director to send these trolls out into space and destroy them, and that the planet Provo be sterilized. There are rumors that Captain-explorer McNary, who has mysteriously disappeared, is organizing the trolls to install him as a dictator. I can't comment on this at this time."

So that's it, thought McNary. French.

The mob scene came back on, along with the voice of the announcer. "City hospitals are

swamped with nervous cases. Trolls have actually driven many people crazy. Though there are some people who like these weird creatures, most people are eventually unnerved by them. The trolls hired as valets, butlers, house-servants, have been fired. Trolls cannot be fired.

"Mrs. Hazel Behopper, of 1133 Prane Drive, reports a typical tragedy involving trolls. Leaving two as baby sitters, Mrs. Behopper attended a feelie-show. On her return she found her house burned down by the trolls acting on the orders of her children.

"Other events:

"John Firsh, a dog-layer, told trolls to spade his garden. He forgot to tell them to stop, and by morning there was a forty-foot pit in his back yard.

"Miss Neever Ginch asked trolls to walk her dog. The exhausted animal is now in an animal hospital. Miss Ginch plans to sue Captain-explorer McNary for mental suffering and loss of companionship.

"Scientists say the Union Analog Computer is inadequate to think up tasks for the trolls. A team of sociologists and psychologists suffered nervous breakdowns attacking the same task.

"Mr. French, previously thought to be instrumental in bringing the

trolls to earth, has indicated that they came without his consent.

"And now back to McNary's hotel and the mob scene."

"Back to the mob scene my eye," commented McNary. He leaped to the balcony, dodged a troll thrown by the big man, and scrambled into his helio. He headed at top speed for the Great House, warning off interfering helios with ripping charges from his blaster. The time had come—if it had not already passed—to speak his full mind to the Director. . .

NINE MONTHS LATER
McNary stood by his ship on Provo and shook hands with a beaming French. French beamed grudgingly, but he did beam. Around him was an enormous entourage of trolls. One held a whisk-broom, and busied himself unceasingly with brushing each fleck of dust from French's uniform as soon as it lighted. Another kept French's boots shined, hopping alongside him as he walked. Two more carried a comfortable chair—without saying a word, French could drop down at any time and the chair would be under him. Another carried cigars, another a lighter, another writing materials.

Strolling about Provoport, each of them similarly surrounded, were

hundreds of humans. Most of them were government officials, but there was a generous sprinkling of ordinary workers, factory foremen and people from all walks of life.

The place buzzed with activity.

"Well, old friend, it's time for me to go," said McNary. "I know you will do your system great credit here."

"Assuredly" beamed French. "You know, Captain—I once didn't like you. Not that I would have hurt you in any way—of course—but I felt you were—well—officious—presumptuous—no respect for leadership. But I must admit your plan is most excellent—having our computers tag out the persons all over earth who are natural leaders, those persons who are skilled directors, and sending them here, where there is such magnificent opportunity for our talents."

"Thank you," said McNary.

A few hours out from Provo he paused in his checking of charts and chuckled. There were still two things French did not know.

McNary knew there had been more than one reason for the man's obvious pleasure. The Provo Plan looked like a perfect setup for ambitious people. Distant from earth, this group would almost inevitably feel its power and attempt to use it against the rest of

the system.

French would be the leader when they tried that, but they would learn something. It would be the thing McNary had learned about the trolls aboard his rocket, when he had ordered one to stop standing French's watch, and that he and the Director had checked secretly. The trolls instinctively obeyed the highest authority. And they had secretly been given certain orders directly from the office of the Director—orders which would make it impossible for anybody to start a rebellion, even a masked one, on Provo.

That was the first thing French did not know.

The second one, McNary found the most amusing. It was the word that he and the Director had used for the people selected to oversee the trolls on Provo. "Natural leaders" and "skilled directors" were words used publicly. But McNary remembered how the director's eyes had lighted up.

"Bossy people!" the Director had said. "By God, this is a marvelous scheme, McNary. Bossy people! They've been a plague on earth since humans came down from the trees. Wonderful, wonderful! A way to get rid of all our petty authorities—small caliber office tyrants—bureaucratic dictators—all our bossy people!"



The Lure Of Galaxy A

by

Ivar Jorgensen

Gorch tusks — incredibly valuable — meant millions of credits. But Hetchel made too many enemies and he didn't know enough about—gorch!

IN THE HUNTING-CAMP, Bree Lennon stood with his arms folded, listening to his employer pronounce a sentence of death on him.

"Lennon, I've finally figured out a way to get these natives to cooperate. I want you to go to their village, find that old chief, and beat him to death in front



of the whole bunch of them. If that doesn't show them that the Earthmen mean what they say, nothing will."

Lennon licked dry, cracking lips. A trickle of sweat dribbled down his cheek. "It sounds pretty risky to me," he said. "The poison-darts — the knives — seems to me they won't take anything like that lying down, Hetchel."

"And if they don't? And if they kill you, Lennon?" Glair Hetchel seemed amused. His thin lips writhed into a smile. "It's all in your contract, you know. Anything I say goes — and I order you to do it."

"Damn you and your contract both!" Lennon snapped. "I followed you out here to Galaxy A because I needed money, not because I was looking for a round-about way to commit suicide. And I'm cursed if I'll pander to your greed by killing an innocent alien chief—"

"Don't talk back to me, Lennon!"

"I'll say whatever I please! We've been on World 16 for more than a week and we're no closer to finding any *gorch*-tusks than we were before we came out here. The natives don't like you and your tactics and if you think beat-

ing their chief to death will make them obey you —"

"I like to be obeyed," Hetchel said. "By filthy natives and by my employees alike." He glanced at the blubbery man at his left. "Dongon, here, thinks the plan will work. And you're expendable. So get moving, Lennon. We're wasting time. Valuable time."

Lennon stared from the thin-faced Hetchel to jellybellied Dongon Sharker. "Why am I expendable? Why not send your pal Sharker? Or your other buddy, Zeeglak?"

"Zeeglak is our auxiliary pilot. Sharker is obviously incapable of the job — aren't you, fat man?" Hetchel prodded Sharker's belly roughly. "That leaves you, Lennon. And if you're not on your way inside of half a second —"

Hetchel smiled cruelly and rage overcame Lennon at the sight. He snorted and dove forward, hands groping for the thin man's throat.

But Dongon Sharker stepped between them, moving with astonishing nimbleness for a man of his weight. Lennon smacked up against the heavy man with a staggering impact and fell back. Hands grabbed him from behind. The third partner, Ruil Zeeglak. An open palm slammed against the back of his neck. Hetchel stepped forward and slapped him twice.

"This shouldn't have been neces-

sary, Lennon. But I'll give you an hour and a half to do the job properly and report back here. And by nightfall we should have all the *gorch-tusks* we'll need. Go!"

Lennon felt himself being thrust out of the hunting cabin into the eternal slimy rain of World 16. He glanced back and saw Hetchel watching him from within, blaster drawn in open menace.

"An hour and a half, Lennon. No more. And do a good job."

"Don't worry," Lennon said. He spat over his shoulder and started into the thick forest.

A MONTH BEFORE he had been on better terms with Glair Hetchel and his two friends.

Lennon had been in the Tavern of Many Worlds on Jellerak VII, resting between jobs. He had just piloted a load of lavon-tubes from Daroul III to the Ghormag system and he was taking a two-week layoff before signing on for a lucrative post in a radon-transporting outfit.

"I'll have another *stirgoob*," Lennon sang out to the many-tentacled bartender.

"Mind if I pay for that, Earthman?" a cultivated voice said.

Lennon looked up and saw a tall, thin man standing over him. The man was so thin he looked two-dimensional; his lean face

was all angles and planes. Behind him stood two others, one extremely fat, an odd contrast to the first, and the other a silent-looking, muscular sort.

"I don't mind at all," Lennon said. "I never mind when an Earthman wants to buy me a drink. The table's big enough for four. Sit down."

The barkeep deposited a foaming *stirgoob* before Lennon. The thin man handed the alien a five-credit piece and said, "Let's have three more of the same."

"I like to know who my friends are," Lennon remarked.

"Sorry. My name's Glair Hetchel; my friends are Dongon Sharker 'and Muzz Zeeglak," he said, indicating the fat man and the heavy-muscled one.

"I'm Bree Lennon. Pilot First Class."

"I know. I took the trouble of checking your record before I approached you. You're down in the books as a topnotch man, Pilot Lennon."

"Thanks," Lennon said, sipping his drink. "But if this is the prelude to the offer of a job, you can skip it, Mr. Hetchel. I'm about to sign on with a radon-shipping team, and I'm very satisfied with the pay."

"May I ask what you'll be getting?"

"Thousand credits a week, as

long as the job lasts. It should be good for at least three months."

Hetchel's eyes twinkled coldly for a moment. He drained his drink and signalled to the bartender for four more. "That should come to 12,000 credits, roughly."

"In all probability."

Hetchel glanced at his two companions—a quick, flickering glance that was answered by two slight nods. Leaning forward he said, "You guessed right: we do have a job proposition for you."

"I told you—"

"I know. You're about to sign on with another outfit." Hetchel's teeth flashed brightly. "Well, it happens that we need a pilot of your caliber, Mr. Lennon, and we're willing to pay well. Our job will also last three months. We can offer you a contract calling for a 15,000 credit minimum guarantee — with the possibility of much more."

Lennon started imperceptibly. *Fifteen thousand?* He had automatically padded the radon people's price; actually, he'd be getting about 10,000 for the three months if all went the right way. And he considered that a damned fine wage.

"15,000 is a lot of money, Mr. Hetchel."

"Too much?"

"I didn't say that. But I'm interested in your proposition. What

sort of job is it and where do we go?"

Hetchel smiled. "Show him, Muzz."

The man named Zeeglak reached into his pocket and drew forth a small leather jewel case. He handed it over to Lennon who stared at the lustrous red leather without doing anything.

"You can open it," Hetchel said. "It won't bite."

Lennon peeled up the top half of the box. A small circular gem of some kind was inside. It coruscated and flashed with an inner life of its own. Lennon peered at it fascinated by the thing's beauty.

"What is it?" he finally asked.

"A small section of a *gorch*-tusk," Hetchel said. "Ground down and polished to a high degree. Ever see anything quite so lovely?"

"No," Lennon admitted. "Where do they come from?"

"World 16 in Galaxy A," Hetchel said.

"Galaxy A! That's a pretty dangerous trip, isn't it? Into another galaxy by hyperdrive?"

"Yes," said Hetchel. "That's why we need a good pilot."

Lennon nodded, still staring at the bright thing in the jewel-box. "I think I get the pitch now. *Gorch*-tusks, eh? How do you find them?"

"The *gorch* is an extremely rare

native animal. The natives know where to find them—or, at least where to find their tusks. You can only make two or three of these things out of each tusk—the rest of the tusk doesn't polish—but there are plenty of people in the universe ready to hand over a hundred thousand credits apiece for a bauble like this."

"I don't doubt it," Lennon said.

"There's been just one expedition to World 16. They brought back half a dozen jewels like this one. I happen to know of several standing orders for more—*unfilled* orders. Well?"

Lennon closed the jewel-box reverently and handed it back to Zeeglak.

"Okay," he said. "When do we leave?"

BUT NOW, WALKING through the fertile glades of World 16's steaming jungles, sent on a mission of suicide by that same Hetchel, Lennon wondered how he could ever have failed to see through the thin man's obvious plan.

He should have known when he found out, shortly before blastoff, that "Muzz" Zeeglak was actually *Ruil* Zeeglak, a former space-pilot who had lost his license when he was caught in a dope-running enterprise operating out of Procyon IV.

But Lennon had always been willing to live and let live, and he hadn't held it against Zeeglak or even said a word about it. When the ship blasted off, Lennon had exclusive control — though he did observe Zeeglak studying his technique as he guided the needle-like ship through the tricky hyperspace tube between galaxies.

At the time he'd been flattered: an ex-pilot observing a skilled professional at work. But now he saw the whole shoddy plan.

Hetchel didn't trust Zeeglak or else Zeeglak didn't trust himself after three years of enforced retirement. So they would hire a pilot to take them to Galaxy A and on the way out Zeeglak would be getting a refresher course in hyperspace technique.

Then, on the way back, only three would return. Why cut Lennon in on the loot when Zeeglak would be able to pilot them back?

So they were sending Lennon on a death mission.

They had been on World 16 seven days. Hetchel's blustering methods had gained nothing but ill-will from the soft-eyed, blue-skinned humanoid natives. He would rage up and down and demand to be shown where the *gorchtusks* could be found — or alternately he would bribe them with beads and trinkets. Neither approach worked.

Well, now force would be used. Lennon was on his way to kill the chieftain of the tribe in the hopes of cowing the rest. It would probably work. And of course in the process some tribesman was bound to put a poisoned blow-dart through Lennon's back.

Lennon scowled and wiped sweat and sticky rain-water from his forehead. On World 16, it didn't rain water, it rained slime. A sticky but fertile colloid emulsion poured down from the heavens constantly. It was just another of the unpleasant aspects of this primitive jungle world where the universe's most fabulous prize was to be found.

Lennon walked on, stifflegged, looking for the clearing that led to the native village.

He was thinking about Hetchel.

What made men that way? he wondered. Lennon realized that he really didn't understand too much about men. He had spent most of his life piloting spaceships and he knew *them* bolt by bolt—but he'd had little real contact with people.

Well, now he had. And he was under Hetchel's thumb. There was no way out, Lennon thought. Hetchel had the ship and Hetchel had the guns. Lennon could either do Hetchel's bidding and be killed or stay here on World 16 and gradually rot away.

He turned, looked back in the

direction he came.

Damn you, Hetchell

LATER IN THE DAY he saw the clearing. He forced himself to take the path that led down to the village.

The scene played itself out over and over again in his mind. He was to accost the old chieftain, threaten him. If he refused to lead the Earthmen to the *gorch-tusks*, Lennon was to kill him. It was as simple as that.

The jungle smell rose up all around him — the ever-present sweet smell of rotting vegetation and accumulating pools of slime. Bright green insects winged past as he strode down the path. The village was visible now.

Lennon reached to the top of his headset and turned on the speech-translator. A muscle in his cheek quivered. He wondered if he could actually make himself go through with the task Hetchel had set for him.

It wasn't the fear of dying, he thought. He faced that every day of his life, every time he blasted off into the darkness on another space mission.

No. It wasn't the fear of dying. It was the fear of staying alive, of keeping peace within his own skull if somehow he should survive the filthy thing Hetchel commanded him to do.

Damn you, Hetchell! I - -

Lennon broke off in mid-thought, gasping. A thick-bodied blue-and-gold reptile was advancing down the bole of a huge tree, unwinding itself foot by slimy foot. It had four tiny legs and a gaping mouth; three beady, bulging eyes rotated rapidly, scanning in all directions.

And one of the naked blue alien babies was toddling down the clearing — squarely in the path of the yawning reptile!

Quickly Lennon's blaster jumped into his hand. But he couldn't shoot now — not without running the risk of hitting the child.

There was only one way to save the baby. Lennon started to run.

He leaped and snared the child with one arm an instant before the mighty jaws snapped shut; Lennon struck the ground heavily, whirled, and looked up at the vast mouth of the reptile.

A forked tongue flickered hungrily. Fangs curved back into the interior of the mouth. Noxious vapors shot forth, almost blinding Lennon with their vile heat. Somehow he forced himself to get his blaster up, to shove it between those jaws even as they readied to swallow him, to fire.

The monster's skull exploded backward and spattered its contents against a vine-hung tree.

Limp with relief, Lennon looked down at the child he held. The

baby was crying and struggling to free itself from Lennon's grasp.

Very appropriate, he thought bitterly. *The baby was innocently marching into the serpent's mouth, but it doesn't want to be held by the loathsome Earthman who saved its life.*

HANDS TOOK THE BABY from him — seven-fingered alien hands. Other hands assisted him to his feet. Lennon wiped away some of the muck and filth and reptile-blood that covered him, and sudded.

Five or six of the World 16 natives surrounded him. He was, as always, struck by their handsomeness. True, their skin was blue, their eyes yellow, and they had the wrong number of fingers and toes. But their bodies were finely formed and well-muscled. Intelligence glowed in their golden eyes. He thought of Hetchel again and wondered just how superior Earthmen were to these innocent people.

One of the young men — the one who had taken the boy from him — said, "You saved my son. Many thanks, Earthman."

Lennon shrugged, not knowing what to say. He hadn't come here on a mission of mercy; he had come to kill.

Another of the aliens said, "You are the man who flew the ship,

are you not?"

"Yes," Lennon said. "I'm the pilot."

"You did not come yesterday, then. Yesterday, your friends were here."

"That's right." Yesterday Hetchel and Sharker had visited the tribe in an attempt to persuade them to yield the secret of the *gorch*-tusks, while Zeeglak and Lennon had remained behind to overhaul the ship's rear firing-tubes.

"Yesterday they hurt some of us and threatened us. Today, you save small children. We will never understand your minds, Earthman."

"The ones who were here yesterday are — different from me," Lennon said.

"Explain?"

"I — I can't." He wanted to say, *Take me to your chief so I can carry out Hetchel's orders by beating him to death*, but he knew it would be impossible for him to say those words or do that thing. Not here, to these friendly, trusting people.

But if he backed out, Hetchel was waiting with the gun —

"I wish to see your chief," he said hoarsely.

HE WAS A WRINKLED, shrunken little old man whose blue skin had faded almost to a pale chartreuse. He sat on a little

stool within a hut whose air was almost oppressively warm.

Lennon stared at him and wondered how he could ever carry out Hetchel's orders.

"You Earthmen," the old chieftain said. "You puzzle me."

"How so?"

"Yesterday, three of you were here. You stormed and raved, and even threatened my life. Today, another comes, and saves a small child from death. Why?"

Lennon shrugged. "There is no reason. We differ, that's all."

"Why do you want the *gorch*-tusks?" the old man shot out suddenly.

Taken by surprise, Lennon said, "Because — well, because they can be made into beautiful things. We like beautiful things back in our galaxy."

"But how can they keep their beauty when you must rob and lie and kill to get them? Surely the beauty must desert the tusks when they are surrounded by so much evil."

"Possibly," Lennon admitted tightly. "But we want them. We value them highly."

"Not highly enough to pay for them," the chieftain said.

"What could we pay you?"

"Nothing. My remark had no meaning. Yet. . . why do you think they *belong* to you, are

yours for the taking?"

Again Lennon had no answer. He faced the old man blankly, without speaking.

"You're silent. Well?"

"We. . . didn't think you valued the tusks, that's all. You didn't seem to have any here."

"The tusks are sacred," said the chieftain. "We keep them hidden." A new look came into his eyes. "Last night the tribe met. We voted to give three tusks to you if you would leave our world and never come back. But can we trust you? You would take our tusks and then would demand more, and more, and more."

"That's not true," Lennon said. But words were hollow in his mouth. He knew inwardly that Hetchel's greed was insatiable, that the thin man would never settle for a mere three tusks. He would want hundreds. And he would not be above promising to leave and then backing out on the promise.

"It — is true," Lennon corrected brokenly.

"Today," said the chieftain, "you indicated you were different from the others. We would trust your word, tall one. But not the word of the thin one, or the fat one, or the broad one."

Lennon frowned. "I think I have an idea," he said. "Let's discuss this a little further."

LATER, LENNON RETURN-
ed to the hunting camp.
Hetchel was waiting for him.

"You've been gone almost two hours. I only gave you an hour and a half."

"It's a long walk, Hetchel. I'm covered all over with this goo. Why couldn't you pick a planet that rained plain old H-two-Oh?"

Hetchel scowled at him. "Don't chatter, Lennon. Did you do what I asked you to?"

"If you mean, did I kill the old chieftain, the answer is no."

Hetchel was out of his chair in an instant and fumbling for his blaster. "You didn't? You're looking to die, aren't you?"

"Hold your horses," Lennon snapped. "I didn't kill him because I didn't need to."

"What do you mean?"

"Apparently the trip that you and your fat friend made to the village yesterday was the convincer. The tribe met last night and voted in favor of turning the tusks over to us before we did something serious—like killing some of them for the information."

Hetchel relaxed visibly. A cold smile played over his thin lips. "Oh. I see. Very good, Lennon. A little well-placed cruelty and they give in! When do we get the tusks?"

"I brought one of the natives

with me and he's going to guide us to the *gorch* graveyard."

"The what?"

"It seems the *gorch* have a place in the forest where they go to die, just as the elephants do on Earth. The natives know where this graveyard is and they've agreed to take us there. Seems there are hundreds of tusks lying out in the open, ready to be grabbed. Hundreds, Hetchel."

Greed was naked on the thin man's face.

Lennon grinned. "You'll have to admit that's a lot easier than hunting down the living beasts, isn't it? We just have to bend down and pick the tusks off the ground."

"Excellent, Lennon! Excellent!" Hetchel turned to his two cohorts. "Get the landcar ready."

"No," Lennon said. "The natives insist we have to go with them on foot and the only weapons we can bring are knives. It would be sacrilege to approach the graveyard with blasters or any other kind of mechanical device."

Hetchel was obviously reluctant but the thought of hundreds of tusks lying in the open broke down his resistance.

"Okay," he said. "I don't like the idea but there's nothing much we can do about it, I guess. Produce your native and let's get going."

THEY ENTERED THE JUNGLE in single file. First went the native the old chieftain had assigned them; after that, Hetchel, Sharker, and Zeeglak. Lennon brought up the rear, a position that didn't please him. If any strange creature were to ambush the party from behind, Lennon would go first. Which would save Hetchel the trouble of disposing of him before they left World 16.

Slime pelted down from above as they wound deeper and deeper into the dark, shadowy forest. The alien led on without talking, without looking back. Lennon hoped with all his soul that this was not some sort of double-doublecross the aliens were pulling.

More than an hour passed. Lennon glanced back and saw that the silvery snout of the ship was no longer visible behind them. There was no telling where they were now.

"How much further to this graveyard?" Hetchel asked. He was carrying three burlap sacks, as was each other member of the party. Doubtless the thin man's eyes were bright with the vision of the return trip, each of them groaning under a barely manageable load of *gorch*-tusks.

"I don't know," said Lennon. "The old chief said it was pretty far into the forest."

The native up front grunted

something and the thought-converters said, "Another half-mile and we're there."

"Won't be soon enough," said Hetchel.

They continued marching. After a while the native stopped walking and glanced at Lennon. Lennon nodded.

"We're here," he told Hetchel. "This is the graveyard, the native says."

Hetchel glanced around. "But—where are the bones?"

"The bones? Still walking around," Lennon said, grinning.

"What the hell do you mean?"

Lennon didn't have time to answer. There was a sudden thrashing in the underbrush, a loud roaring noise, the sound of falling trees—

And the *gorch* appeared.

There were eight of them, each the height of a man and 10 feet long. The razor-keen tusks projected sharply before them. And they were very much alive. Red piggish eyes flashed brightly. Deep roaring snorts came forth.

"What kind of trick is this, Lennon? You said they'd be —"

The sentence went unfinished. The *gorch* charged.

The lead beast came plunging toward them, stepped around the native, and went straight for Don-gon Sharker. The fat man screamed and started to run.

His foot caught in a low-running vine and he pitched forward on his face. The *gorch* uttered a triumphant cry and the sharp tusks sank deeply into the fat man's soft body.

At the same time Ruil Zeeglak was clinging to a tree, trying to climb. Two of the beasts impaled him simultaneously.

"It's a trick!" Hetchel yelled harshly. "We're trapped."

He fumbled in his blouse and drew forth — not a knife but a blaster. Lennon scowled. Hetchel could not be trusted even in that.

The blaster spurted once and a *gorch* stumbled and crashed heavily to the ground. Hetchel fired again, killing another of the beasts, and then aimed the gun at the native.

Lennon leaped. He caught Hetchel squarely and knocked him to the ground. They rolled over and over in the slimy underbrush while Hetchel tried vainly to use his blaster. Lennon's fists tattooed the thin man's fleshless body. Hetchel squirmed but Lennon was taking out all of his hatred, all the welled-up loathing.

"Watch out!" the alien's voice cried. "Watch out!"

Lennon jumped back lithely, narrowly missing a bolt of energy from Hetchel's gun.

"I'll get you," Hetchel cried thickly. "I'll — ahhh!"

One of the remaining *gorch*

pounced on him. The sharp tusks raked through Hetchel's skin, tore up muscle and ripped through nerve tissue. Hetchel screamed once more and was silent.

Lennon looked away. "He got his *gorch*-tusks, all right. Right in the belly!"

The alien glanced at him and said, "Let us go back to the village, now. You will be given your three tusks by our chief and then you must leave our world forever."

"Don't worry," Lennon said. He wiped goo from the back of his neck and stared at the three bloody, trampled bodies lying in the clearing. The surviving *gorch* were wandering around docilely, making no attempt to attack. "I won't be back," Lennon said.

He fingered the amulet the chief-tain had given him — the mysterious amulet that made him untouchable to the *gorch*. The amulets that Hetchel and his cohorts had not been wearing when Lennon led them into this trap.

"Let's go," he said. He turned and followed the alien back through the forest, leaving the three corpses and trying to forget that such men had ever existed.

Later that night he blasted off from World 16 of Galaxy A — alone, except for three *gorch*-tusks and the memory of three dead sharpies.



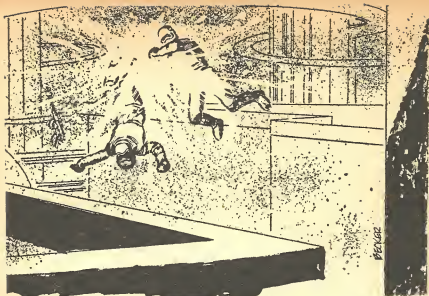
DECISION FINAL

by

Robert Randall

The Machine was running the city and everyone respected its orders. But the real question was:—Who was running the Machine?

THE NOTIFICATION came thudding out of the wall-slot that connected Grey Harkness' one-room dormer with the giant computing machine which governed Appalachia City. Harkness grabbed the slip of paper eagerly, ripped off the seal of



the computer, unfolded it, read.

Joy turned to desperation.

It said:

HARKNESS, GREY 432-j-1603 —

Be advised that your petition for marriage permit, taken out jointly with Smithson Joanne 321-k-1872 is herewith denied on grounds of incompatibility, and any marriage between you and Smithson Joanne will be prohibited.

Numb, he let the official form slip to the floor. A confused mixture of emotions bubbled up in him — anger, rage, despair, above all hatred for the computing machine that had so coldly

and so permanently barred him from the girl he loved.

There was no sense appealing the verdict. The Machine never reconsidered.

He flipped on the visiphone and punched Joanne Smithson's key-numbers. The numbers were routed through the vast circuits of the Machine; seconds later, Joanne's face appeared on the screen. Her blonde hair was uncombed, her light-blue eyes red-rimmed with tears. Harkness stared at her for a minute, not knowing what to say.

Finally she spoke first. "Did you get the notification from the Machine?"

He nodded. "It just came. Flat no. Incompatibility, they said."

"That's what my paper said too. Incompatible."

Harkness scowled. "It can't be true! How can that machine know or not know who's incompatible? Darling, I love you! What does a bunch of electronic circuits know about love?"

Joanne's face looked set, resigned. She said, "The Machine is wiser than all of us, Grey. If it says we're incompatible... I guess . . . it must be right. Even if we don't believe so ourselves. . ."

Her voice trailed off faintly. Harkness shook his head; he couldn't bring himself to share Joanne's blind faith in the machine's judgment. "There must be something we can do! The Machine can't keep us apart!"

Joanne looked very pale. "I . . . received a second notification this morning. It . . . it was a marriage license."

"A what?"

"The Machine has decided to assign me a mate," she went on, in a level, flat voice. "He's Henry Kerston. The marriage is supposed to take place in four days. I have to go to the Brides' Dormitory tonight and stay there until the wedding."

Harkness felt what little was left of his world shatter and crash to pieces about him. "Kerston? No

— it's impossible. Stay right there, Joanne. I'll be coming over to see you. We'll figure this thing out."

"Grey —"

But her tentative protest was cut off by the whirring of the arrival slot behind him. "The Machine's got another message for me," he said. "Maybe the whole thing's been cancelled as an electronic error. Or" — his voice became dark — "Maybe I've been assigned a mate too."

He opened the new message and read it aloud.

"HARKNESS, GREY 432-j-1603 —

"Be advised that as of 0900 this morning you have been declared an enemy of the State and are to report immediately to your local Communication Center for interrogation. Any violation of this order will be met with punishment."

Joanne's expression was one of fear and shock. She said, "Grey! What have you done?"

"Nothing — unless you call thinking violent thoughts about the Machine a criminal offense. There's something funny about this, something rigged . . ."

"The Machine can't be wrong, Grey."

"No," he said. "But maybe it can be mistaken." He looked at his watch. It was 0910. He was going to have to move fast to avoid the police-robots.

TEN MINUTES later the cop-terbus let him off outside the vast residence-hall where Joanne lived.

He dashed into the lobby, punched out her number on the lobby screen and waited. Moments later her face appeared.

"Grey! Why have you come here?"

"I have to see you," he said. "I'm coming up."

She started to shake her head, then said with obvious reluctance, "Well — all right."

She met him at the door when he stepped out of the lift tube on the 63rd floor. She was wearing a clinging synthoplast negligee which left little to the imagination. Harkness kissed her as he entered. It was something he had done a thousand times but now there was a reserve, an unwillingness in her response that troubled him.

Inside her tiny apartment he whirled to face her. "Joanne, I don't know why the Machine has picked us to bring all this trouble to. But I mean to fight back."

"Fight the *Machine*?" Conflict was evident on her pale face. "Grey, don't be insane. The Machine protects us, it regulates our lives, it —"

"It keeps me from marrying you!" he snapped tightly. "Joanne, don't you see that your blind loyal-

ty to the Machine is going too far? Sure, the Machine's a wonderful thing — the first impartial, incorrupt government man has ever known. But how do you know the Machine's still impartial? Suppose Henry Kerston arranged this whole thing? He's a Machine technician and I know he's wildly jealous because you love me. It might not be hard for him to fix things so the Machine rejects our application, assigns you to him, and declares me a criminal!"

"I can't believe that," she said. But there was doubt in her voice. "Darling, I still feel the same way I always did about you and the idea of marrying Henry Kerston almost sickens me. But if the Machine says so . . ."

Harkness pummelled his palm with his fist. "The Machine! The Machine! Can't you think for yourself, Joanne? There's still time. Let's get away from Appalachia, away from America, even. There are places that aren't ruled by computing machines. We could live there . . . together."

"I'd never be happy, knowing I had run away."

He shook his head bitterly. The Machine had ruled mankind 150 years; the idea of defying it was incomprehensible to her, it seemed. "Maybe the Machine's right," he said. "Maybe we *are* incompatible. Otherwise you'd drop everything

and run with me."

She smiled coldly. "The Machine is right, Grey. I still love you . . . but if the Machine says our marriage wouldn't work out, I believe it. It takes a long-range view. We love each other now but how will it be in 30 years? The Machine knows best."

He saw the futility of trying to argue with her — indeed, of doing anything. He was on the verge of reporting to the Communications Center and turning himself in when the room screen suddenly blared into life.

"Harkness Grey 432-j-1603! Are you in there?"

Harkness looked around wildly for a place to hide. But the screen went on, "You needn't be silent, Harkness Grey. You have been traced. We know you are there. The building will be surrounded by pursuit-robots. Please surrender quietly, Harkness Grey. Do not cause a disturbance."

"One last chance," Harkness whispered to the girl. "Will you come with me? I'm going to try to escape."

"Sorry, Grey. I believe the Machine knows what's best. But . . . I still love you, anyway. I won't forget you."

"Thanks," he said sarcastically. Suddenly angry, he turned, avoiding the kiss she offered him, and yanked open the apartment win-

dow.

"Grey! What are you going to do?"

"Escape," he said.

Behind him, the blaring of the screen continued. "Harkness Grey! Do not remain silent! Avoid unnecessary disturbance in effecting your capture!"

"So long, Joanne," he said, and climbed through the window.

H HE STOOD FOR A MOMENT on the broad window-ledge, carefully not looking down. Then he began to climb. The building was heavily encrusted with chrome, in the contemporary architectural style. Harkness thought the chrome ornamentation was hideous but now he was grateful to whatever architect had built so many handholds into the building's skin.

Minutes later he reached the roof and paused there, drenched with sweat. He knew the pursuit-robots were buzzing around the base of the building, perhaps even on their way up to Joanne's apartment to apprehend him. Maybe they wouldn't think of looking for him up here.

The roof was clear, a wide, flat expanse. Harkness glanced up to make sure no police copters hovered above.

It took nearly a minute to cross the surface of the roof. He arrived at the other side and peered down

into the gulf that separated the building from its neighbor.

The street below was filled with gleaming metallic dots. At this distance they looked like angry beetles but they were the Machine's pursuit-robots. Pretty soon, discovering him gone, they would come swarming up to the rooftops after him. But by that time he hoped to be —

Where?

He didn't know. His only way out was to keep running. Seven or eight buildings spread out before him, their roofs roughly at the same level. If he could make it across the rooftops to the end of the block and down and, out of sight before the robots arrived —

He bunched his thigh-muscles and leaped. There was a six-foot gap between Joanne's building and its neighbor, and a two-foot drop. He made the jump easily, kneeling as he landed to absorb the shock. He had to keep going.

Ahead of him a skylight opened. A figure some four feet high, its skin a glowing bronze color, emerged and goggled at him.

"We order you to halt!" the pursuit-robot commanded. "Harkness Grey, you are under arrest!"

There wasn't time to debate the situation. Harkness ran forward, straight at the robot, and bowled it over. Pursuit-robots in themselves

weren't very powerful; it was just when a group of them snared you that you were stuck. The robot fell, sputtering and growling, and Harkness kept running.

Five more of the robots appeared on the next roof and began advancing toward him.

He froze, not knowing which way to go. He was trapped!

The robots would not kill except under extreme provocation, which meant threat of destruction. He debated charging into their midst and trying to knock them off the roof but he saw he could never cope with five robots at once. They had him now.

The sound of a copter's whirring rotors came from above. Surrounded?

No!

A ladder dangled. A voice shouted, "Come on, Harkness! Let's go!"

The pursuit-robots were drawing near. Harkness looked up and could see no one in the copter's cockpit. Shrugging, he grabbed the dangling ladder. He was drowning; someone had thrown him a straw.

He started to climb.

Halfway up the robots began firing their stunguns. One shot caught the heel of one foot and numbed it; desperately he pulled himself up into the copter and lay there, gasping in air.

The voice said, "Okay, Harkness. Away we go!"

He looked up. The copter was completely empty. It sprang up from its hovering position and, moments later, the rooftops of Appalachia City were just blurs in the hazy distance.

After a few minutes Harkness rose and unsteadily made his way up fore to the copter's cockpit. His left foot ached mercilessly; it would be three or four hours before the effects of the stray stunbeam wore off.

He entered the cockpit, dropped into the empty pilot's chair and said, "What's the game? Who's running this copter anyway?"

The voice he had heard before said, "My name is Lee Fletcher. I'm speaking to you from Canada."

"Canada?"

"Northern Ontario, to be precise. There's a colony of us here—outcasts from Appalachia City and other machine-dominated regions."

Harkness began to understand. "I guess I owe you thanks, then. You got your copter there just in time."

"I followed the whole thing on remote video," Fletcher said. "We couldn't risk coming down to pick you up ourselves—but with this remote-control operation of the copter we didn't need to."

"How'd you know about me?" Harkness asked. The copter, jets blazing, was streaking rapidly northward.

"We have contacts in the Machine's trust. They let us know whenever someone gets in the kind of trouble you got in. We've snatched more than one fugitive from the pursuit-robots this way."

Harkness fell silent. He looked around but no police copter pursued. After awhile the throbbing in his foot began to lessen and he relaxed, letting the pilotless copter carry him further and further away from Appalachia City—and Joanne.

LEE FLETCHER TURNED out to be a short, rotund individual in his late forties, cheerful, friendly, warm. He was one of the first persons Harkness met upon descending from the copter.

The colony was well protected—hidden by overhanging trees and guarded by a radar net. If attack threatened these people would be ready.

"You'll have at least two rooms to yourself up here," Fletcher said. "Unlike conditions in Appalachia City. We have plenty of room. And there's no computer at all—at least, none, telling us what to do."

"I'm sure I'd like it here," Harkness said. "You've been very nice to me in the three hours I've been here. But I can't stay."

"What?"

"No. I'm grateful to you for rescuing me but I left some business

unfinished in Appalachia City. There was a girl..."

"I know. If she had been on the roof with you we could have brought her along also. But there was no way we could manage that."

"She wouldn't have wanted to come," Harkness said. "She's loyal to the Machine. Loyal to the point of being willing to marry this Henry Kerston if the Machine tells her to. But I'm not giving up. If I could prove to her that the Machine's been tampered with as you say it has..."

"You'd have a hard time proving it," said Fletcher. "Why don't you stay here, Harkness? There are women here—women who don't have any false illusions about the Machine. If you return and they catch you we won't be able to rescue you a second time."

"I know. But you don't seem to understand one thing. I love this girl. She loves me. But she's willing to sacrifice herself to the Machine's wishes because she honestly thinks the Machine knows best. If I could show her her mistake—"

Fletcher sighed. "You're a stubborn man," he said. "But I admire stubbornness. The copter's at your disposal any time you want to return to Appalachia City."

"Thanks," said Harkness. He rose and gripped the other's hand. "I'll leave at once—and thanks for the meal and the rescue and every-

thing else."

"Sure."

Harkness grinned. "And I'll promise you something right now. I'll be back. *We'll* be back. Soon."

"I hope so," Fletcher said.

Dark clouds of night were dropping as Harkness made the lonely journey back to Appalachia City. Fletcher guided him in by remote control; he didn't have to touch a knob the whole journey. The copter slipped into the city under cover of night.

"Where are we now?" Harkness asked.

"Over North Appalachia City. Where do you want me to drop you?"

"Leave me on the rooftop at 1016 Center Boulevard. I can manage from there. When I want you again I'll use the signal-crystal you gave me."

"Right."

The copter dipped, dropping vertically in the darkness of the night. Harkness patted the equipment bulging in his hip pocket. If he could only avoid capture for the next few hours he could solve his problems.

The copter came to a precise halt on the building's flat roof. Harkness jumped out, landing lightly; the copter's rotors whirled and the vehicle started to rise. Harkness turned back, waved once at the pilotless copter, and watched it

vanish into the cloudy, moonless night.

-Then he began to grope across the roof for the skylight.

Henry Kerston's apartment was on the 58th floor—Room 5803, unless memory failed. As a computer technician he rated a two-room apartment.

Harkness lowered himself through the skylight, hung for a moment, dropped. The sound of his fall echoed through the building's halls and he crouched, drawing the blaster Fletcher had given him, looking around.

He grinned. Certainly the Machine would not be coming every square inch of Appalachia City for him every hour of the day. Too much caution was foolish.

But he would not trust himself to the elevator. There might just be a police-robot in there and in such close confines he'd have trouble getting free. He made his way down the stairs, floor after floor until a glowing 58 appeared on the landing ahead of him.

He turned off at Floor 58 and tiptoed down the quiet corridor to Room 5803. A neat placard on the door said:

KERSTON, HENRY 123-b-3162
Computer Tech

The time was 0200; Kerston was probably asleep. There was no point in ringing the doorscreen, either. Once Kerston saw Hark-

ness' face he'd never be admitted.

Instead Harkness trained his blaster, on low-beam, on the lock. Bathed in flame, it grew beet-red, went soft. Harkness cut off the beam and nudged the molten lock out with the butt of his blaster. Then he pushed the door open.

A BODYGUARD-ROBOT stood just inside the door, quiescent. Despite his surprise Harkness managed to put a bolt through the robot's control centers before it could move. The lights went on. Kerston sat up sleepily in bed, blinking, staring at the ruins of the bodyguard-robot.

"What the hell is this? Who are you?"

"Take a good look," Harkness said, keeping the blaster trained levelly at Kerston's head. "I think you know me."

The sleepiness left Kerston's face. He said, "You're Grey Harkness. There's an all-city alarm out for you. What are you doing here and what do you want? Trying to get in even more trouble?"

"So far the only crime I've committed is breaking and entering and I did that just now." Harkness perched himself comfortably on a webchair facing Kerston's bed and wagged the blaster. "I came to talk to you. I hear you're getting married, Henry."

Kerston's jaw tightened. "So?"

"You happen to be getting married to my fiancée."

"Wrong. She's not your fiancée any longer. I know that the Machine turned down your application for a marriage permit with Joanne. And simultaneously it selected me as her mate. I'm very happy to say we'll be married in three days."

"The Machine said Joanne and I were incompatible," Harkness said coldly. He studied Kerston's scrawny form, his thin features and beak-like nose. "And I suppose you and she fit together like *this*."

"Maybe. The Machine said so."

"I don't think so, Kerston. This is too neat, too slick and pat for the Machine to have done it. Let me tell you what really happened."

"When my application for a permit came to the Machine, it was sent to you for filing. Being a computer tech, you took advantage of your status to monkey with our data. You made it look as if we were incompatible—and then you finagled things so *you* would be named to marry Joanne. To top it off, you manufactured some trumped-up charge against me that would keep me on the run until the marriage could come off. Eh?"

Kerston was grinning nervously at him. "I suppose I should indignantly deny your charges," he said. "But since you're a madman who's probably going to kill me anyway, I might as well tell you

that you're absolutely right. I'm guilty of every single one of the false manipulations you accuse me of. Well? Are you going to shoot me now?"

Harkness laughed triumphantly. "I wouldn't waste a blaster-beam on you, Kerston. Killing you is the last thing I'd do. No. I'm simply going to the Machine and turn in the tape I've been making of this conversation. Let the Machine know it's been tampered with. I'm confident that the Machine will see that justice is done."

It was Kerston's turn to laugh now—a low, malicious, sardonic chuckle. "Go ahead, Harkness. Take your silly tape to the Machine! You deluded fool!" Leaning forward in bed, eyes fixed intently on the snout of Harkness' blaster, Kerston said, "The Machine was taken over by a group of technicians, including myself, three months ago. We destroyed the main control center and have been operating the Machine ourselves. Go: report to the Machine. See what happens when you hand in your tape!"

Kerston's taunts sank in. Harkness' fingers tightened on the blaster but he kept from firing. Killing Kerston would accomplish nothing.

Sweat drenched him. The idea of the Machine being operated by a cabal of computer techs stunned

him. Kerston and his cronies held all Appalachia in the palms of their hands!

It meant a slight alteration in strategy, thought Harkness, but in a way it made things easier. He left his chair and bound Kerston securely with tanglecord.

"You'll stay put for a while, I think." Keeping the blaster trained on him, Harkness backed out of the room and into the silent corridor.

WOMEN WHO WERE ABOUT to be married spent their last few days of maidenhood in The Brides' Dormitory, a blocky building on West 324th Street. There they were educated in the ways of the State and prepared for marriage.

Grey Harkness entered the main pavilion of the Dormitory at three in the morning, after a long and tiring cross-city trot. He couldn't risk taking a public conveyance; instead, he had skirted along quiet side streets and through back alleys, crouching out of sight at the approach of a police-robot.

A robot sat at the desk, staring outward at nothing in particular. Concealing his blaster, Harkness said, "Is there a Miss Joanne Smithson living here?"

"Incorrect form."

He scowled. "I'm looking for Smithson Joanne 321-k-1872. Is

she here?"

"Yes. She checked in a little while ago."

"I'd like to see her."

"Impossible. Brides-to-be must remain in complete seclusion. Besides, she's asleep."

"That doesn't matter," Harkness snapped. "What room is she in?"

"It is impossible for anyone. . ."

The blaster appeared. Instantly the robot reacted, going for a weapon of its own, but Harkness moved faster. He drilled a sizzling hole through the robot's control centers. The synthetic creature slumped.

Quickly Harkness leaped over the desk railing and snatched out the directory. Not much time remained to him. He thumbed through it and found *Smithson Joanne*. She was on the 43rd Floor, in Wing A.

He raced within and found an empty elevator. Stepping inside, Harkness pressed 43.

Wing A turned out to be a sprawling corridorway lined with rooms on both sides. Only a dim night-light burned in the hall. Moving rapidly, Harkness went from door to door until he found the one marked *Smithson Joanne*. It was locked. He blasted open the door.

Joanne was asleep. Nude, she lay atop her covers, a hypnotic learning-mech strapped to her temples. Gently Harkness woke her.

"Joanne! Quiet—it's me—Grey!"

She woke, startled, and snatched

the covers around her. "You're not allowed here! Get out!"

"Darling—don't make noise. I came here to rescue you."

"You're a criminal," she said bitterly. "I don't want to see you again."

Ignoring her remark, he took the pocket tape-recorder out. "I just paid a visit to your fiancé, Henry Kerston. He said some very interesting things, and I taped them."

"Get out!"

She looked very pretty when she was angry, Harkness thought. She was trying to maintain her dignity even though she was nude under the thin wrap; it wasn't easy. He pushed the playback stud. Kerston's voice said, "*What the hell is this? Who are you?*"

BEFORE IT WAS OVER she was sobbing. He let the tape run its course.

"The Machine...run by technicians! How horrible! And I was willing to abide by its decision!"

"Don't feel guilty, Joanne. You were acting according to what you thought was right. You had no reason to mistrust the machine—and if it said Henry was to be your mate and not me, you accepted it."

"What do we do now?"

"There's a place in Canada where there isn't any Machine—where men are free to govern themselves.

All I have to do is use a signal-crystal and a copter will pick us up wherever we are." As she dressed he said, "We'll have to climb to the roof. I shot a robot in the lobby and they probably have it cordoned off by now."

They were only 10 flights from the roof and they used the stairs. Joanne was panting by the time they arrived. Harkness drew the signal-crystal from his pocket and activated it. "Fletcher's copter will be here any minute," he told her.

"I can't wait. Darling, I'm so sorry for everything I've said and done since this started..."

"There they are!" a cold voice said behind them.

Harkness turned and threw Joanne to the ground with one quick shove. Three figures were emerging from a secondary skylight at the far end of the roof. Harkness hefted his blaster. One of the three was unmistakably Kerston; the other two were robots. Dropping to his knees, Harkness fired. One robot dropped. The blue ray of a stunbeam passed overhead and then Harkness dropped the other robot. Kerston dodged out of sight behind an upjutting stanchion.

"Give up the girl," Kerston shouted. "I know you've got her there, Harkness. If you harm her I'll have you flayed. This place is going to be full of police-robots any minute. I've been following

you ever since I got loose."

Harkness scowled. There was no sign of Fletcher's copter—and Kerston probably wasn't bluffing when he said the police-robots were on the way. He couldn't risk a gun-battle, either—not with Joanne up here.

This time he was really trapped. No way to escape, no bluffs possible. "We're stuck," he said to Joanne. "Go—go back to him. I'll hold them off as long as I can."

She looked up at him and smiled warmly. Then she said, loudly, "Let me go back to Henry, Grey. I'm sure all the things you claim are lies. Don't keep me here against my will."

He stared at her. "Okay. Go back to him."

She rose and ran across the roof to where Kerston hid. "Don't shoot, Henry darling! It's me—Joanne. He's out of his mind, isn't he?"

"Of course—the madman," Kerston said. "Come here."

Harkness was unable to see what was happening but he heard the sound of a kiss. Then a sudden hoarse yell, followed by a long, gradually-dying wail. He saw Joanne racing back across the roof toward him. Her face was pale; she looked sick. "I...had to kiss him," she said. "But he won't bother us any more. I made up my mind."

A dark shape hovered above them. Fletcher's voice said, "Better hurry up, Harkness. There's a bunch of police copters on their way. I can outrace them if you get aboard now."

He boosted her up, and followed her in. Moments later, they were cutting a blazing trail across the night sky.

Some day—someday soon, Harkness' promised himself—he would return and help to free Appalachia City of the Machine. But for now he had Joanne and would have her always.

★ *Old-Fashioned Robot* ★

THE followers of science fiction can't help but see the word "Robot" in the daily papers. Reporters, scientists, engineers and people from every walk of life talk about "robots" as glibly as they speak of the weather.

But these robots bear no resem-

blance to the classic robot of science fiction. Automatic computers, mechanical brains, push-button gadgetry—this is true robotry, but where are the glittering robots of yester-year?

Can you recall the mechanical monsters cast in man's image, the

metal claws, the ponderous torso, the crystalline eyes? Where are these horrors? Is there any likelihood that we shall ever see them?

Without hedging too much, it would seem that the robot of science fiction is improbable. The robot of Karl Kapek's "R.U.R." is a pure fiction. His only reality lies in any de-humanized person and that probably is the symbol that is meant.

The robots we shall know will be, as they are now, beneficent. They are purely and simply, sur-

rogates for men's muscles and routine mental workings. You might argue that automatic machines and mechanical brains are not robots—but they are—and much more real ones than the beloved bug-eyed monsters of s-f.

Wipe a tear from your eye, weep just a little at the passing of this fiction. The only trouble that we shall have from the robots is that life may become too easy. This seems quite conciliatory. It's much better than having a pseudopoded horror jumping from the shadows!



No doubt about it, space affects people in screwy ways. Take this guy who came racing into port, chasing a gal in a nutty game of —

TAG. YOU'RE IT!

by

Mark Reinsberg

I WAS FINISHING up my shift at the spaceport when Ssssssss!

He zoomed down out of space so fast he almost couldn't stop his small private cruiser at the edge of the field where the forest begins. His forward rockets blazed him to an explosive halt, singeing the front row of trees, and before the smoke had cleared he was out of his ship and running towards me.

"Another crazy asteroid-hopper," I mused, disgustedly turning my back on the guy. "What is there?" I asked myself, "what is there about the fifth orbit of the solar system that makes people behave so erratically?"

I climbed into my copter but he caught up with me before I could slam the hatch.

"Where is she?" he demanded breathlessly. "Which way did she go?" He clutched the hatch des-

perately, as though he wanted to rip it off its hinges.

I stared at him scornfully. He was a huge, homely, balding, middle-aged man with apelike matting on the back of his enormous hands.

"Who?" I asked coolly.

"The woman," he exclaimed, panting from his two-hundred yard dash. "You know. The woman!"

I stared at him a little harder. He was incongruously dressed in an ancient-style Tudor doublet of black and silver, with metallic grey trunk hose and a plumed beaver hat.

That was one of the crazy things about people in the asteroid belt, something I hadn't been able to get used to, though they say you get as crazy as the rest after your first year. People go around dressed as though every day was some kind of a masquerade ball.



"Buddy," I said finally, "I don't know who you're talking about." I started the copter motor.

"Wait! Wait! My God, you've got to help me find her!" he cried, leaping into the seat beside me. He was wheezing heavily like an asthmatic orang-outang. "She was a beautiful woman. She landed here not more than two hours ago. You must have noticed her."

I shook my head, smiling at his

ignorance. "Friend, this is a pleasure asteroid. One of the largest resorts this side of Mars. I must have seen a dozen good-looking girls land in the past hour alone."

"I'll describe her," he said eagerly. "She was a gorgeous brunette. Sexiest figure you've ever seen."

"Look," I interrupted, "I'm a port-worker, not the inspector general. Only thing I pay real attention to is empty fuel tanks." I nodded

in the direction of outside. "Now do you mind hopping out?"

He refused to budge. Tears suddenly filled his blood-shot eyes. His fists closed convulsively. "I've got to find her. I'll pay you a hundred sols if you help me."

A hundred sols are a week's wages. I took new interest. "What did you say she looked like?"

"A very beautiful woman," he erupted, soulfully. "Tall. Formed like a Venus, like the goddess of love herself. Long golden brown hair flowing like grain in a harvest. Eyes like a pair of blue stars—"

"Haven't seen anyone like that." I broke in prosaically. "What kind of a ship was she flying?"

"Oh. The ship." He took off his plumed beaver hat, massaged his bald cranium. His expression was puzzled. "I'm not sure. I think it was a Studespace."

"That's not much help, mister. We have hundreds of those parked in the lot. Do you know the year and model?"

"Jesus, I don't know," he said miserably, crumpling his hat in his hands. "Maybe it was a new 2310; maybe it was last year's. All I can really describe is the woman. She had on a spectrum-colored bikini when I last saw her."

That flashed a light on my mental panel. I remembered the bikini. Very few women wore them nowa-

days except for formal occasions. And few should unless they're correctly proportioned. Which this woman hadn't been. The main reason I remembered her, at all, was that she looked so exceptionally unattractive in what she was (or more to the point, what she wasn't) wearing. She was certainly no Venus.

"Ah!" he gasped, "you have seen her!" his hands trembled excitedly.

"Yes, I saw a girl dressed that way, but—" *She was repulsive*, I was about to add. I checked myself; there's no accounting for taste in the asteroids. "—But I'm not sure she was the woman you're looking for."

"She must be!" he cried. "She must be. There can be only one like her in the whole universe." His face flushed with enamored eagerness. "Where did she go? Which way? Quick! We must find her."

"Control yourself. There's only one place a person can go on this over-rated chunk of rock. That's to the Apollo hotel."

I released the copter propeller and we rose into the air.

A POLLO WAS ALSO the name of the asteroid itself. Apollo was an egg-shaped planetary fragment two miles in length, equipped with artificial gravity three-fifths

that of Earth, and an envelope of enriched atmosphere half a mile high. Except for the frozen dark side which never saw the sun, and ice-covered skiing slopes along the twilight fringes, Apollo had a warm subtropical climate.

"My name's Peery," I said.

He hesitated. "Smith is mine."

I looked at him skeptically and let it go at that. I noticed a large comet-stone ring on the second finger of his left hand.

"Can't you go any faster, Mr. Peery? God, I've chased this girl all over that asteroid belt. I haven't slept for three days. I've just *got* to catch up with her!"

"Emergency of some sort?"

He looked at me with his blood-shot eyes. "For me, a desperate emergency."

"Why don't you call in the space patrol?" I inquired.

He was a trifle embarrassed. "It's not that kind of emergency."

We skimmed low over the surface of Apollo, a thick green throwrug of trees planted generations ago by the resort's original promoters. A tiny stream flowed through the forest, fed by a large swimming pool alongside the hotel, dotted with nude bathers.

We landed in the parking lot. "I think your — uh — girl was on the hotel copter that arrived here about two hours ago," I said. "You

can go in and check with the desk clerk."

"Yes, yes." Smith hopped out. "Come along, Mr. Peery. I'll need your help."

I held back a moment. A hundred sols was a lot of money, but the situation seemed mighty weird.

Smith whipped out his wallet. "I said I would pay you well for your services. Here. Take fifty sols in advance."

I took the money. He strode impatiently ahead of me towards the hotel entrance.

Hotel Apollo was a shimmering, semi-transparent birthday cake of a building in three staggered layers, surmounted by a great stone statue of the ancient Greek god. Near the doorway you got on a conveyor belt and robot busboys carted off your luggage, if you had any.

Smith broke into a run at the doorway. "Look out!" I warned but he ran smack into another robot, the greeter trying to hand him a cocktail. The two of them crashed to the floor, as the robot's recorded female voice piped "Compliments of the house. Welcome to the Apollo."

Charlie Gimple was on duty that afternoon, a thin sunken-cheeked man in his late thirties with a mixed expression on his face of servility and disdain.

"Charlie," I said with a straight

face to the desk clerk as Smith was brushing a cherry and toothpick off his doublet, "this gentleman is looking for a lady."

Smith bounded to the desk. "She was a very beautiful brunette. She couldn't have registered more than two hours ago."

"What was the name, sir?"

A frustrated look came over Smith's face.

"Mrs. Smith?" I suggested slyly.

"Uh-no, she wouldn't have used that name."

"Hmm," said Charlie with a cynical expression.

"She was an extremely gorgeous girl," said Smith, fumbling. "She—ah—"

I decided to earn my hundred sols. "Charlie, she wore a spectrum-colored bikini. Very good-looking girl," I added with a barely perceptible wink.

That recalled it for Charlie too. "Oh yes," he said, looking down at his register, "I remember a guest answering that description. That would probably be Miss Jones."

Another phoney name, I mused.

"Should I ring her?" asked the clerk. "Whom should I say is calling?"

"Phoning won't be necessary," said Smith. "Just give me the room number and I'll—"

"Oh, sir, I'm sorry. We can't give out that information."

Smith flew into a rage. He pounded his hairy fists on the counter. "Damn it, you've got to give me her room number! I've chased her all over hell. I've got to see her immediately!"

Charlie was getting wooden-faced, starting to say it couldn't be done in the firmest of tones, and I was all set to give him the secret 'you'll-be-richly-rewarded' highsign, when Smith suddenly wheeled about.

"That's her!" he yelled, pointing across the lobby.

I stared and, sure enough, it was the same repulsive-looking girl I had remembered. Then there was a flash of rainbow color and female flesh as she zipped out the doorway.

Smith took off like an Olympic sprinter and narrowly missed for the second time knocking over a robot. I followed as close behind as I could. We burst outside, ignoring a lobbyfull of dazed and dirty looks, and took off in pursuit.

"Stop! Stop!" Smith was bawling at the woman.

She headed towards the swimming pool. She was a very fast runner, unencumbered as she was by too many clothes. For that matter, we all three made terrific speed in the light gravity of Apollo. We gained on her along the shores of the large oval pool, as naked bath-

ers plunged into the water to get out of our way.

Then the woman—let's call her Miss Jones—darted in the direction of the forest. When we reached the trees she was already out of sight.

"Great Pavo!" Smith swore, "she's gotten away from me again!" He sank to his knees and began to sob.

"No, wait, don't give up." I pulled him to his feet. "Listen, Smith, I know these woods. Follow me and stop blubbering."

The woods were dense, but there was a narrow footpath paralleling the stream. We trotted along it fairly rapidly.

"What makes you think she stuck to the path?" Smith queried breathlessly.

"If she doesn't she'll get lost. We have to assume she's smart enough to realize that." I was beginning to get winded myself.

ABRUPTLY WE BURST into a small clearing and were nearly run through by fencing sabers. Two men dressed in shorts were duelling away furiously, as a single woman spectator, a beautiful dark-haired girl in Grecian chiton, calmly smoked a cigar.

"That way," she said, pointing at the path's continuation.

"Thanks, lady," said Smith.

More crazy people, I thought, as we pounded along the forest trail. What in the name of heaven am I doing here?

The path dwindled. The trees grew more closely together, in a tangle of foliage and hanging vines. We slowed down almost to a walk. Smith was wheezing and stumbling.

"Come on," I encouraged. "Miss Jones can't be making any better progress than we are."

"Yes," he gasped. "I've got to—"

There was a terrifying scream overhead. A naked man clinging to a vine came whizzing down from a treetop. Swinging in an arc close to the ground, he kicked Smith's shoulders and soared up to a perch on another tree.

"The woman went that way," he called, pointing further along the path. Then he pounded his chest and cried: "*Oe-ee-oo-ee-ay-ec!*" until the forest rang with echoes.

Ruefully, Smith picked himself up from the forest floor.

"Crazy people," I muttered aloud. "The whole asteroid is filled with crazy people!"

We staggered on for another hundred yards, at the point of exhaustion. The trail was virtually gone. The forest had become almost impenetrable. We stopped to regain our breath. Smith sank to the ground. I leaned against a tree. A burning smell assailed my nostrils.

"How can she keep on going?" said Smith hoarsely.

"It's superhuman," I said. "It's madness. It's not worth a hundred sols."

All at once, Smith's eyes widened like a pair of moons. "Look!"

Just ahead of us, almost hidden by leaves, crouched the girl. She was panting tumultuously, like a cornered animal. Her bikini was badly torn. Her flesh was a crisscross of scratches, red welts.

Smith lurched forward drunkenly. The girl made one last effort to flee, dragging herself a little deeper into the thicket. We both plunged after her. The burning smell grew stronger in my lungs.

There was a frenzied scramble and rustle of underbrush.

"Caught you! Caught you!" shrieked Smith insanely. "Caught you! Caught you! Caught you!"

I rushed to his side to prevent an act of violence, but he subsided almost immediately. The tense, haunted look drained away; his features relaxed. He began to smile. Then he chuckled. Then he laughed uproariously.

The girl got to her feet, and she too was smiling.

"That was tremendous," she said. "Simply tremendous."

"Yes," Smith agreed. "It really was."

I was puzzled, vastly puzzled.

But suddenly I knew one thing. I knew where we were. We had reached the opposite edge of the forest, alongside the spaceport. A few feet ahead of us were the trees burnt by Smith's rocket blast.

We crawled through the remaining foliage and stood beside his ship.

"Look, Mr. Peery," said Smith gleefully. "She's not running away from me any more."

"Yes, I see." I half expected him to embrace and kiss her, but he just stood there grinning. I glanced at the girl. Actually from a closeup she wasn't such a repulsive-looking girl at all. Tall. Pretty face. Nicely modelled figure.

"Well, Smith," I said, "I'm glad you finally caught Miss Jones. And apparently she isn't too unhappy about it either. Now, can we settle up so I can go home to my wife?"

"Oh yes, Peery." Smith stood in the entranceway of his ship. "I still owe you fifty sols." He pulled out his wallet. "Here it is, fellow, and thank you. You sure did earn it."

I took the money.

He slapped me heartily on the shoulder. "Tag!" he bellowed. "You're it!"

Smith ducked into his ship and closed the hatch. He began taxiing away across the field.

I stood there shaking my head

in amazement. "Crazy, crazy people."

It took me about ten seconds to realize also that the girl was not in the ship with him, that she was standing right alongside me.

"Hey," I exclaimed, "he left you behind!"

"Yes," she said, smiling agreeably.

"After all that effort?" It seemed absolutely incredible. And she was really such a good-looking girl. "Well, what are you going to do now?" I asked her.

"Oh, that won't be any problem," she said. "I'll just get back in my ship. It's parked right over there."

We walked towards the lot.

"Boy," I said, "that's something I'll never be able to understand. The way that fellow chased you."

"Mmm," she said noncommittally.

I looked at her again, and I wondered how I had missed appreciating how beautiful she was. We reached her ship, a brand new 2310 Studespacer.

"And what did Smith mean by that childish stuff at the end?"

I asked her. "That 'tag' business?"

She paused at the doorway of her ship, the most beautiful girl I had ever seen.

"What he meant was exactly what he said. Tag. You're it."

Her door closed. She taxied away and took off.

It hit me in a rush, like a fever, like a fury, like an unappeasable frenzy. My God! She's getting away! The sexiest girl in the universe! The beauty of beauties! The living, walking, breathing goddess of love!

I dashed to the nearest spaceship. Not mine, but that didn't matter. I couldn't let her get away. No. That would be unbearable.

I rocketed into space with back-breaking acceleration. She was already ten minutes ahead of me, dodging in and out of the planetary fragments. Where was she going? Which asteroid would she land on next?

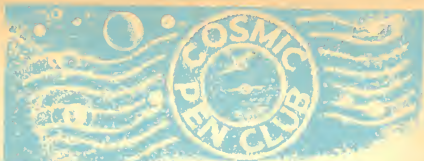
Mister, have you seen a very beautiful woman? Long golden hair flowing like grain in a harvest? Eyes like a pair of blue stars . . . ?

THE END

FEATURED NEXT ISSUE: —

GIANT KILLER

What would happen to mankind if overnight our race started growing in size—and didn't stop? Don't miss this amazing new novel by Dwight V. Swain. It's startling—and different!



A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

TECHNICIAN

Glenn Godwin: P.O. Box 368, Binghampton, N.Y.

Age: 38: "I'm single, an electronics technician interested in time travel, creative writing, ham radio, classical music, coin collecting, and handwriting analysis. Will answer all letters."

STUDENT

John Saseen: 1317 Eoff St., Wheeling, West Va.

Age 14: "I'm a science fiction fan, interested in chemistry, stamp collecting and rocketry. Would like to hear from other readers my age."

TELEPHONE OPERATOR

Helen Noe: 99 Winthrop Dr., Akron 19, Ohio.

Age 20: "I'm single, a long distance telephone operator. I'm interested in science fiction, astronomy, chess, ESP, and all related subjects. Also like swimming, and popular music."

STUDENT

Stony Brook Barnes: Rt. 1, Box 1102, Grants Pass, Ore.

Age 15: "I'm a collector of old 'pulp' type magazines, s-f included. Would like to reach others who collect. Am also an amateur cartoonist."

GRADUATE STUDENT

Fred Galvin: 840 Algonquin Ave., St. Paul 6, Minn.

Age 21: "I'm a grad student in math. My interests besides s-f are chess (especially unorthodox varieties of the game) and Kriegspiel. Would like to hear from anyone interested in playing unorthodox chess

or Kriegspiel by mail."

STUDENT

Dick Pratt: 1021 Dodd St., Napoleon, Ohio.

Age 14: "I'm a high school freshman, interested in all fields of science, particularly astronomy. Would like to write to other s-f fans."

SHUT-IN

Donald A. Thompson: RR 2, Box 93, Muncie, Ind.

Age 20: "I'm confined to an iron lung, but have a companion to do my letter writing for me. I'm interested in ESP, psychic phenomena, ancient history, UFO, stamp collecting, and most anything that's unusual. Would appreciate hearing from s-f fans."

STUDENT

Stephen Sala: Box 1, Osburn, Idaho.

Age 16: "I'm interested in ham radio, astronomy, and s-f. Would like to hear from others to exchange ideas on flying saucers, Atlantis, etc. Also like to play chess by mail. Am taking astronomy in college, and also have a tape recorder to use in corresponding."

ASSISTANT EDITOR

Don Johnson: 1350 University Ave., Bronx 52, N.Y.

Age 19: "I'm assistant to the City Editor of the *Newark Star-Ledger*. My hobbies include tennis, horseback riding, swimming, dancing, and skating. I'm also studying at Columbia University and would appreciate hearing from others, particularly in my area."

SWEDISH STUDENT

Rieka Dalmuldes: Lovlundsvagen 50 B, Nynashamm, Sweden.

Age 16: "I'm an s-f femme fan here in Sweden. I'd like to hear from American boys and girls my age. Besides s-f, my interests include dancing, films, and recordings—lots of rock 'n roll."

HOUSEWIFE

Laura McElroy: 17613 Baltar St., Northridge, Calif.

Age 25: "I'm a housewife, mother of 3 children. I used to do photolab work, now print my own pictures at home. I like gardening, horses, and most of all—flying saucers!"

STUDENT

David Locke: P.O. Box 207, Indian Lake, N.Y.

Age 18: "I'm an s-f enthusiast, also interested in astronomy, swimming and oceanography. Am quite interested in theories concerning Light. Hope to hear from other fans similarly interested."

CANADIAN STUDENT

Bob Bidwell: Ganges, B.C., Canada.

Age 18: "I'm studying electronics in school, with hobbies including s-f, photography, flying saucers, and collecting 'different' recordings. I hope to hear from others."

STUDENT

Harry Lee Witherspoon: 314 Mill St., Williamsburg, Ky.

Age 17: "I'm a high school student, s-f fan, with interests includ-

ing astronomy, UFO, and in particular flying saucers."

SWEDISH FAN

Per-Ake Lindgren: Box 27, Orsundbro, Sweden.

Age 13: "I'm an s-f fan in Sweden, anxious to contact letterfriends in America. My main hobby is books and stamps."

STUDENT

Ann Thomas: 1624 Madison Ave., Huntington, West Va.

Age 15: "I'm a sophomore, interested in all sports, particularly baseball and swimming. Am studying fashion art. Enjoy reading and art."

CANADIAN FAN

Michael B. Clivinsky: 79 Eaton St., Elmwood, Winnipeg, Man., Canada.

Age 30: "I'm interested in photography movies & TV, sculpturing, and comic strip writing. Am single, and hope to hear from others."

STUDENT

Harry Thomas: 310 South Oak St., Sweetwater, Tenn.

Age 16: "I'm a junior in high school, with only one principal hobby—collecting science fiction magazines. Particularly fond of Edmond Hamilton's work. Would like to hear from other fan collectors."

STUDENT

Paulette Balogh: 302 West 15th Ave., Homestead, Pa.

Age 13: "I'm interested in corresponding with others on science, chemistry, and stamp collecting. Am

a freshman in high school."

ARMY SERVICE WOMAN

Sgt. Louisa Z. Chainey: Registrar Section, DeWitt Army Hospital, Ft. Belvoir, Va.

Age 55: "I'm a widow, and have been in the Service 12½ years. Have been an s-f fan since '52 when I returned from a tour of duty in Germany. Am interested in time travel, telepathy & longevity, and space satellites. Am a student of intuition and would like to hear from others."

STUDENT

George H. Wagner, Jr.: 39 Wilbers Lane, Ft. Thomas, Ky.

Age 15: "I am very, very interested in science fiction. Have been so since 1955. Would like to get in touch with other fans."

STUDENT

David Wasson: 1501 4th Ave., NW, Great Falls, Mont.

Age 15: "I'm a sophomore, very interested in science, flying saucers, and metaphysics. Would like to hear from others in my age bracket."

STUDENT

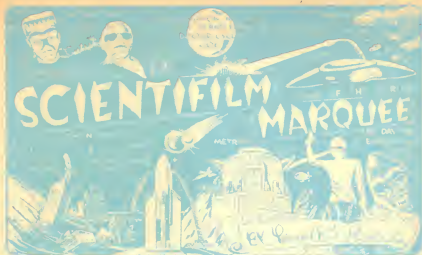
Nancy L. Parker: 3929 Charlemagne, Long Beach 8, Cal.

Age 15: "I'm a high school sophomore. My interests in s-f include extraterrestrial life, ESP, flying saucers and interplanetary travel. Hope for a doctorate in science. Like swimming, tennis, and dancing."

—In sending your listing, include name, address, age, occupation, and general interests.Editor



"Man, dig those crazy sideburns!"



T EENAGE SPUTNIK and I WAS A PRENATAL INFLUENCE, written by J. Forester Eckman, produced by Jay F. Ackman, directed by J.F. Manack, starring Jeff Forman, a pair of Phaik Films, is hereby revealed in a confidential Hollywood scoop, exclusive to readers of *IMAGINATIVE TALES*, to be a hoax! (At least I *hoax* so!)

But it is admittedly getting more difficult to separate truth from fantasy when, with a sober face, Roger Corman announces that his *Viking Women* has been entitled *Viking Women vs the Sea Serpent*, and this information is later superseded by the amendment that the

marquee title will be *THE SAGA OF THE VIKING WOMEN AND THEIR VOYAGE TO THE WATERS OF THE GREAT SEA SERPENT!*

"Russian says Soviet ships will visit planets soon"—this is not a quote from today's newspaper but was published 3 years ago in the pressbook of *CONQUEST OF SPACE!* Other promotional copy released in 1954 in conjunction with Pal's picture predicted "space satellite possibly by 1957."

The astounding total of 43 sateloid films have been announced for production, the complete list being compiled herewith for the very firsttime:

IGY
 SPUTNIK
 SATELLITE
 BABY MOON
 IONOSPHERE
 560 MILES UP
 HIGH VACUUM
 SPACE ISLAND
 INVISIBLE SUN
 THE 13TH MOON
 ROGUE MISSILE
 RED SATELLITE
 SPY IN THE SKY
 VISITOR FROM X
 LOST SATELLITE
 MAN-MADE MOON
 SPACE FORTRESS
 THE SKY LEGION
 MAN IN THE SKY
 ARTIFICIAL MOON
 7 MILES A SECOND
 THE ASTRONAUTS
 THE LITTLE MOON
 SPACE TRAVELLER
 SPACE SATELLITES
 * 5000 MILES AN HOUR
 SPUTNIK THE FIRST
 SATELLITE ROCKETS
 WAR OF SATELLITES
 LEAVING THE EARTH
 SATELLITE IN BLOOD
 18,000 MILES AN HOUR
 SPACE STATION—USA
 DESTINY FROM SPACE
 SATELLITE OPERATION
 CIRCLE EARTH IN 90 MINS.
 CIRCLE EARTH WITH SAT'S
 AROUND EARTH IN 90 MINS.
 ROBINSON CRUSOE ON MARS
 PROF. HAGGE'S PVT. PLANET
 ARTIFICIAL SPACE STATIONS
 THE MAN IN THE SATELLITE
Intercontinental Ballistics Missile

Ray Bradbury's "Fahrenheit 451" has been published in Czechoslovakia and Russia; any day now we may expect an announcement from the USSR that Sovjetfilm will produce Bradburski's "And the Sputnik Be Still As Bright".

Re Bradbury on the serious side, he was telling me in his home the other day of the tremendous reaction to *The Sound of Different Drummers*. This was a major futuristic melodrama telecast on Playhouse 90 which brought Bradbury's blood to the boiling point because of its "Incredible" similarity to his own work, *Fahrenheit*. "Friends I had not heard from in years phoned me the next day about it," he informed me. William Nolan, Bradbury acolyte No. 1, told me that in his opinion the teleplay copied Ray's novel about 80%. Bradbury has prepared a 30 page document outlining what he considers to be the plagiaristic qualities of *Drummers*, and a lawsuit is pending at the time this issue goes to press.

HALF (half?—three-fourth's) of the satellite stories announced for filming will never get off the ground, of course, but there also seems to be a Survival Cycle perceptible. Looming largest is the best-selling ON THE BEACH, Nevil Shute's Atomigeddon novel of the 1960s that has already gone into a 6th printing and reached over 6 million readers via multi-city serialization in 33 U.S. newspapers. Stanley Kramer has paid \$100,000 for the book and the author will share in a percentage of the profits; production, following "Inherit

the Wind", will be on a multi-million dollar scale. *Island of Lost Women* will deal with survival in an atom-shattered world, be produced by actor Alan Ladd for Warner Bros. release. George Raft is being paged to play *The Man Who Stole the Atom Bomb*, a Russell Birdwell original, and Sol Siegel has purchased *End of the World* from Paramount (who had 4 scripts on it) for production at 20th-Fox. Harry Belafonte will star in the small-casted survival story.

Smallest cast of all—2—will be in Richard Matheson's ADAM & EVE, an MGM production. Matheson himself is, at time of writing, in London scripting his own "I Am Legend", the fabulous horror story of the last blooded man on earth. . . surrounded by thirst-mad vampires.

TITLE CHANGES: John Wyndham's novel, "The Midwich Cuckoos", to VILLAGE OF THE DAMNED. . . *Monster on the Hill* to I WAS A TEENAGE MONSTER (there's other kinds of teenagers?) put that switchblade down my delinquent fan; I didn't mean you, of course. . . Amelia Reynolds Long's "The Thought- Monster" to A FIEND WITHOUT A FACE. . . *The Girl from 2 Million A.D.* (based on Henry Slesar's "Bottle Baby") to SHE CAME FROM 5000 A.D. (less far to travel, that way). . . and Frank Quattrocchi's *Giganturo/ Gigantoso* to THE GIANT WOMAN.

Wm. Alland, after many successes at Universal (*It Came from Outer Space*, *This Island Earth*, *Tarantula*, etc.) will continue scientific-making at Paramount, his tee-off

tale being an off-beat sub-teen story, *The Space Children*. During December he'll be producing THE COLOSSUS OF NEW YORK which, a call to his secretary establishes, is a kind of Gotham (not to be confused with Gothic) Frankenstein.

The Fantastic Puppet People and THE RETURN OF THE COLOSSAL MAN have master prop-maker Paul Blaisdell busy 'round the clock. Blaisdell's next project: construction of a 25 hour clock.

Ron Kenner has come up with *The Invisible Monster*, Thad Swift & Norman Rice with *Sinvala*, Jerome Bixby with an untitled Thing-type thriller, Thad Swift & Budd Bankson with *The Boy Who Saved the World*, Gil Frye with *The Evil Eye*, Jerrold Zinnamon with *The "S" Bomb*, Brooke Peters & Jane Mann with an original robot story, Bankson & Ackerman with FRANKENSTEIN FROM SPACE, Bankson & Jackson with *The Day Before Tomorrow* (a sci-fi comedy), and Grady Zimmerman, Ron Cobb, Jon Lackey and Martin Varno have something big, big, BIG on the fire as a quartet.

Bram Stoker and Mary Shelley would be about the richest pair in the graveyard if they could share in profits from the resurrection of their world-famous brain children, DRACULA & FRANKENSTEIN. Coming in the current horror cycle are *Curse of Dracula*, *Blood of Dracula*, *I Was A Teenage Frankenstein*, *Baron Frankenstein* (British teleseries), *Tales of Frankenstein* (39 vidpix to be telecast over ABC network with Boris Karloff host-

ing) and *Frankenstein's Castle*, feature film for Warner release in which Karloff himself will return to play the original Monster.

Thanx-for-Info Dept: "Dune Roller" to be filmed as *Voodoo Eye* in color in Haiti (Ed Spiegel). . A French version of Robert Louis Stevenson's "Dr Jekyll & Mr. Hyde" to star Jean (*Beauty and the Beast*) Marais and be produced in Paris early in '58 (F. Hoda). . . *Killer on the Wall* has been title-changed to *I Bury the Living* (Don Grollman). . A new KING KONG on United Artists production slate (Lloyd Eshbach). . . "And the Rock Cried Out" may be marquee'd as *Manana* (Ray Bradbury). . John Drew Barrymore has outlined an original end-of-the-world idea (Cara Williams). . A one-shot WONDERAMA publication featuring stills and synopses of a hundred or more monster, saucer, interplanetary, invention, prehistoric, etc, sci-fi and fantasy films from *First Men in the Moon* (1899) to "First Teenager on the Moon" (1958?) is in the works for national newsstand release early in the New Year (James Warren).

Hoping that Fanta Claus brings all of you all of the wonderful new scientifilms you want to see during the New Year, this is Scienti's helper signing off—

—Forrest J. Ackerman

SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE is a regular feature.

Columnist Ackerman may be contacted via the Beverly Hills, Calif., telephone exchange by interested contributors.

STATEMENT REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933, AND JULY 2, 1946 (Title 39, United States Code, Section 233) SHOWING THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION OF IMAGINATIVE TALES, published bi-monthly at Evanston, Ill., for March, 1958.

1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are: Greenleaf Publishing Company, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Ill.; Editor, William L. Hamling, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Ill.; Managing Editor, Frances Hamling, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Ill.; Business Manager, None.

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5. The average number of copies of each issue of this publication sold or distributed, through the mails or otherwise, to paid subscribers during the 12 months preceding the date shown above was: (This information is required from daily, weekly, semiweekly, and triweekly newspapers only.)

WILLIAM L. HAMLING, Editor
Sworn to and subscribed before me this 19th day of September, 1957.
(SEAL)

/s/ W. A. PELZ
My Commission Expires May 27, 1960.

Letters

from the Readers

E FOR EFFORT

Dear Bill:

Although I never read TALES before the November issue I would like to give you my congratulations for a good magazine. You led the issue with a novel (SHIP FROM INFINITY) which brought out a feeling of human nature and actually showed a soul in the characters. This is an amazing feat in s-f and not to be taken lightly. Showed good planning on your part.

In scanning through the letter department (looking for readers interested in ESP) I found a gem of an example of what I consider self-centered idiocy. I refer to the letter by Alice Murphy who had nothing but ridicule for your magazine. Despite her derogatory remarks, I know, by reading her letter, that the issue she panned could not have been as bad as she says.

To show my contempt I will become one of your most avid fans.

Kenneth E. Fritsch
2526 Perrysville Ave.,
Pittsburgh 12, Pa.

Glad you discovered TALES. But don't be too hard on Alice. This was probably her first encounter with good s-f and the shock was too much for her!wlh

SOFT LASH

Dear Bill Hamling:

Just a line to let you know that IMAGINATIVE TALES and IMAGINATION are going great guns. Just keep on using stories by Alexander Blade, Edmond Hamilton, Dwight Swain, and S. M. Tenneshaw and you might get closer to the top.

Now for the lashes. For one thing, I don't like continued praising of your magazine by you. Sure *Madge* and *Tales* are good. They have to be to sell. But stop reminding us. Also, don't keep harping on the subscription deal. Again, we don't have to be reminded.

Don Kent

3800 Wellington,
Chicago, Ill.

More stories by your favorites coming up. And we'll watch the plugs. No more than a dozen per issue we promise!wlh

GOOD FIND

Dear Bill Hamling:

I have been an avid reader of your companion magazine, IMAGINATION but had never read TALES for the simple reason that it never showed upon the newsstands here—that is, until your November issue. (In reading your editorial I found out why.) You've got a good book and you can rest assured I'll keep on buying it.

THE SHIP FROM INFINITY, although enjoyable, was not Ed Hamilton's best. The other stories were all good with the exception of HOUSEMAID No. 103 which I didn't understand.

Richard Sendelsky
425 Augustine Pl.
Perth Amboy, N.J.

Anybody who has trouble finding issues of either IMAGINATION or IMAGINATIVE TALES should pick up the phone book for their town and call the wholesale magazine distributor listed there. We would consider it quite a favor and with a complaint there would be action toward correcting the problem. . . . So what didn't you understand about the HOUSEMAID story?wlh

MONSTER MAN

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I enjoy Forrest Ackerman's SCI-

ENTIFILM MARQUEE in each issue of TALES. But I do have two complaints: why doesn't Forry list more U-I film reviews, and although I too like Paul Blaisdell, why doesn't Ackerman say more about Bud Westmore?

Personally I think Mr. Westmore is the best monster man in Hollywood. His Gill-Man and his mutant from THIS ISLAND EARTH will be hard to beat by anyone.

Bill Warren
P.O. Box 115
Gardiner, Ore.

Forry reviews or lists as many Universal-International films as are reported to him. Just for the record, Paul Blaisdell is an artist, while Bud Westmore is a makeup man. We imagine that Paul has more to do with designing sets and gadgetry than he would with the makeup department of any studio. So you really can't classify them togetherwlh

ON THE "UP" JUMP

Dear Bill:

Just like the pogo stick business, TALES has its ups and downs. The November issue is definitely on the up jump.

Not so much in the story content, which is dished out every issue with a sameness that rarely varies. What I enjoyed most—despite my vows not to—was the letter column.

Therefore, allow me to go to bat for Jim Brooks of Baltimore. You ask him to back up his time-travel denunciation with facts. Well, you're in the same position on the

pro side—where are your facts?

Who wants to argue with me on my point of, that going by present-day knowledge time travel is impossible? I don't mean our knowledge of machinery—but of time itself.

I contend that, although time travelers would make good story material for your mags, at the present stage they certainly wouldn't make any business for a Temporal Motel.

Here's something to mull over—if time travel was possible, and I went to, say, 1900, I would have no physical experience in that period. For, while I might be in the time 1900, I would not be in any place existing in that period. In other words, I would have no vocal, or other contact with residents of the period because the time 1900 and the places of 1900 are entirely separate. To go to New York I cross physical space. To go to 1900 I cross temporal space. Having no relation they have nothing in common to connect them. Ergo, impossible.

Tom Harris was the only new writer in the current issue. Are you building your own stable of contributors?

Roger Ebert
410 E. Washington,
Urbana, Ill.

Obviously the question on time travel cannot be backed up with facts; but then, until a few years ago you couldn't have backed up a point on an atom bomb with proof. The proof, as always, is in the pudding, and until somebody whips a pudding you're only guessing. Point is, Jim Brooks feels that the

very subject, time travel, is ridiculous. You apparently concur. We don't. In science fiction we like to think that anything is possible.—Even your theory on time travel. Certainly we cannot disprove it. Real point at issue appears to be an opinion that time travel is not science fiction. Since practically everything else in the field is coming true—with Russia putting live creatures up in space yet and putting their trademark on the moon—what does science fiction have left? . . . How many new authors do you expect per issue, Rog? Let us know how you like Harriswith

FOR SOUNDER BACKGROUNDS

Dear Bill Hamling:

Old World Wrecker Hamilton writes again. SHIP FROM INFINITY is a typical smashing action story, complete with Villains Incorporated. I've heard there are trends in story heroes and villains, but the Company or Corporation is never out of favor for the "heavy" role. Well, it wasn't a bad story as such go.

TRUCKSTOP: readable. THE ANDROID KILL: one of those annoying superficial treatments of a theme. DEATHTRAP PLANET: . . . what was I saying about Corporations? For once we have a hero who doesn't pull his punches. But . . . that multipurpose name again—Dane. Equally good as first or last name. GET OFF MY PLANET: trivial. HOUSEMAID No. 103: a good joke.

Comes the question, shall I take any of this stuff seriously? Sadly, I must. So many of your stories

have the implication that people are going to be as bad as ever. Thus, the ruthless corporations composed of greedy, power-seeking people are just taken for granted. And the writer just goes ahead, buckety-buck, with his action story without any thought in the matter. Now you take a novel like Heinlein's *BEYOND THIS HORIZON*. It has its villains, too, but they are solidly set against a background of well-thoughtout society. And they are seen to be just "little men" with big ideas . . . in the end you feel almost sorry for them. Or you take the android pogroms. A perfect reflection of racial hatred. But no science fiction writer has ever treated to my satisfaction the questions: why androids in the first place? Why human-like beings for menial labor? Unless (and that has been suggested) they are meant to be targets for hatred, to make people feel superior . . . In all this I am taking the viewpoint that an author is responsible for the ideas he puts—however poorly—on paper.

Dainis Bisenieks
506 S. Fifth Ave.,
Ann Arbor, Mich.

We can't agree with you from the very beginning that the Hamilton novel was just an "action" story. This was a novel with feeling, the awesomeness of deep space and a ship vast beyond belief. We felt that awe—and still do. In our opinion it was one of Ed's finest stories. And we hope he turns in others of similar quality right along! For us SHIP FROM INFINITY is at the top. Now what's all this about villains. If we understand you correctly it's better to have conflict

among "little" people with big ideas—people such as you or I, etc. We have only this to say: what's glamorous about the "little" people? Only the possibility that they can become big. So why not use those already "big" and get it over with. The downfall or triumph is just as effective and in the meantime we're adventuring on top level. Vicariously you can see the other side—the big side. Nope, we have nothing against heroes and villains being corporate tools—or wheels. Vive la Villains Incorporated! . . . As to androids, man constantly perfects new machines to do his work and bidding. And since man is basically vain, why not construct a machine in his own image? The interesting part comes,

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WALTER FIELD Dept. 35

6399 Wilshire Blvd. Los Angeles 48, Calif.

of course, when man makes an android too close in image for comfort. When the android starts thinking he's better than man, comes the pogrom—and a good science fiction yarn. An author is responsible for only one thing: he must entertain. His ideas are merely tools, gimmicks. The story he tells must satisfy—and whether a story does or not separates the men from the boyswlh

FOR BETTER S-F FILMS

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I like your magazine; I thought **THE SHIP FROM INFINITY** in the November issue was a truly great story. This is the kind of story and science fiction that should be filmed in Hollywood. It would certainly be welcomed over the junk pictures featuring nothing but monsters these days.

Hollywood is missing a sure bet.

Mrs. Laura McElroy
17613 Baltar St.,
Northridge, Cal.

*We go along with you 100%. After great s-f movies like **WAR OF THE WORLDS**, **THE DAY THE EARTH STOOD STILL**, and a few others, the current crop of s-f. films is sad indeed. Hamilton's novel would make a truly great space film. Hollywood take notewlh*

FAST READER

Dear Bill Hamling:

First the stories in the November **TALES**. The novel, **THE SHIP FROM INFINITY** inspired my sense of awe and wonder—as so many readers say Ed Hamilton has

a habit of doing. With a lot of intrigue, the story was a top-notch s-f adventure.

TRUCKSTOP was terrific. It was well-humored in the right places, and the kind of story I love to read. Rog Phillips writes a good yarn.

ANDROID KILL was an exciting, well-set, above average yarn. **DEATHTRAP PLANET** was also exciting, but **GET OFF MY PLANET!** stunk. **HOUSEMAID No. 103** was a funny, good tale.

The cover on November—for the first time in years—didn't have a girl on it! Astounding! (No reference to the mag—I like yours better!) My only gripe is that both **MADGE** and **TALES** take me only two hours to read—each. And, oh yes, speaking of your new distribution system for the magazines, my favorite stands no longer carry the books. But heck, I have a subscription anyway.

Jeff Wanshel
6 Beverly Pl.
Larchmont, N.Y.

*Glad you have that sub, Jeff, but really, WE care if you can't find **IMAGINATION** or **IMAGINATIVE TALES** on favorite newsstands. As requested earlier—and we'll repeat since we consider it of great importance—any reader who can't find our books without some difficulty, please complain to your local wholesale magazine distributor. Most readers do not subscribe and therefore we depend mainly on newsstand sales each issue. This is true of all science fiction magazines. Ask for **MADGE** and **TALES** and complain when you don't find themwlh*

WE'RE RACKED!

Dear Hamling:

Rack up another one—another dirty word on the fence.

The stories in the November TALES—though vastly superior to those of previous issues—were laughable and we shan't bother with them. The cover looks like a comic book—understandably so.

I rate the issue only for the cartoons: 1. Scheffy on page 63; 2. Kohler on page 75; 3. Scheffy on page 109; 4. Kohler on page 117.

Don Dixon
215 Elm St.,

New Britain, Conn.

We accomplish something, at any rate: we give you a laughwlh

BEST IN YEARS

Dear Bill:

THE SHIP FROM INFINITY by Edmond Hamilton in the November issue was the greatest story in years. It must have a sequel. Get more stories by Hamilton. What a writer!

Ned Reece
Rt. 3, Box 68-A
Kannapolis, N.C.

More on the waywlh

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To This Earthman on the Planet "Solaria" An
Unclad Girl Was Far More Dangerous Than

THE NAKED SUN

by
Isaac Asimov

ON THE PLANET "SOL-
ARIA" Earthman Elijah
Baley should NOT have blushed
to the ears when beautiful Glad-
ia Delmarre casually stepped
out of her shower to talk with
him! For all Solarians CON-
SIDERED THAT ENTIRELY
PROPER . . . because their so-
cial contacts were carried on by
VIEWING through two-way
television.

And just as Elijah (an Earth-
man brought up in under-
ground cities) was terrified by
Solaria's naked sun, the Solar-
ians dreaded mingling with
other HUMANS. Physical con-
tact was out of the question.
Even DISCUSSING such things
was obscene!

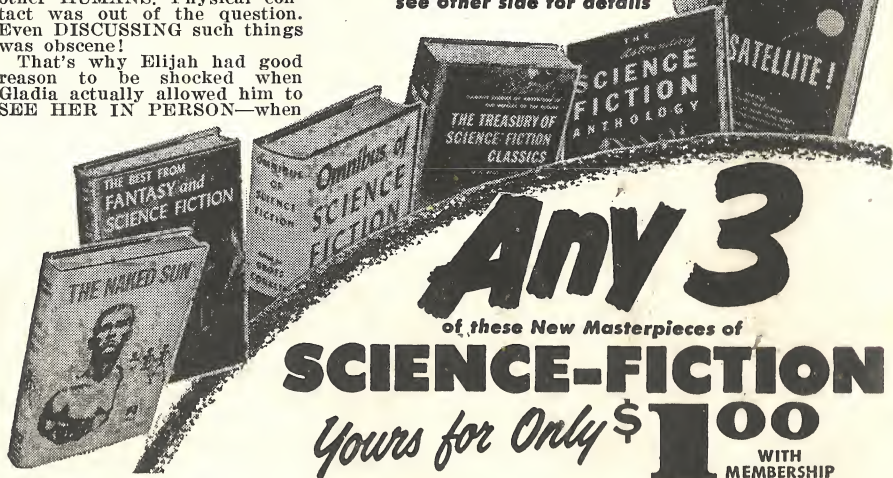
That's why Elijah had good
reason to be shocked when
Gladia actually allowed him to
SEE HER IN PERSON—when

she brazenly reached out her
naked fingers to TOUCH HIM!

There was no doubt left in his
mind that there was something
unspeakably strange about this
exotic temptress. But it was be-
coming more and more difficult
for Elijah to admit—even to
himself—that she was his prime
suspect in a fantastically sordid
murder!

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